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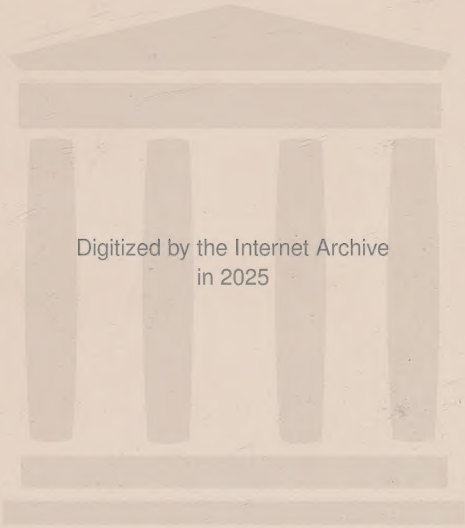

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SIMPLICITY

ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL

BY

MONSEIGNEUR DE GIBERGUES

BISHOP OF VALENCE

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FROM THE FRENCH

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DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF SIMPLICITY

SIMPLICITY, ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER I

DEFINITION AND IMPORTANCE OF SIMPLICITY

WHY does the Gospel present to us the dove as the model and ideal of Christian simplicity, saying: 'Be ye . . . simple as doves'?*

To understand this, we must have a clear idea of what simplicity really is.

'There is,' says Fénelon, 'a certain simplicity which is a fault, and again, a simplicity which is a marvellous virtue.' We will speak only of the virtue, for that alone is alluded to in the Gospel.

Simplicity, according to the Gospel, is nothing but purity of intention; the two expressions are synonymous, and may be used one for the other.

* St. Matt. x. 16.

In reality 'pure' signifies without mixture. We say of water that it is pure when it is unmixed with wine or with any other substance.

Likewise, 'simple' signifies that which is not multiple, not even double, but which is one. We say of a garment that it is simple if it is of a single colour, unburdened by detail. We say of a person that she is simple if she is neither affected, secretive, nor insincere; if she speaks as she thinks, and appears what she is; if she is unlike those of whom the sage says: 'They walk in two ways,' they have 'two hearts'—in a word, if she is not made up of two persons, one artificial and exterior who poses for the gallery, the other wholly different, and who dissembles and hides to avoid the eyes of the world, but whom God sees and judges.

The idea of purity or simplicity is thus really one and the same. It excludes all alloy, all mixture, all complexity, all duplicity, all that which St. Paul calls 'the prudence of the flesh, the wisdom of this world.' Simplicity, or purity of intention, consists in keeping before yourself, in all your thoughts, words, and acts, one and the same end, one and the same object—namely, the pleasing of God, or, more accurately, the doing of His Will.

Thus understood, simplicity appears to us as a virtue at once essential and far-reaching.

'Man was created for God,' says St. Ignatius, at the beginning of his 'Spiritual Exercises,' in that first meditation which he justly calls 'fundamental,' because it is the foundation of the whole Christian order. These admirable 'Exercises' are based entirely upon this first profound truth; they are, as it were, but its commentary and development.

God is, in effect, the sole veritable end, the last end of man. If man sees but God, seeks but God, attaches himself but to God; if he voluntarily directs towards God his thoughts, his words, his acts, and his whole life; if in some sort he passes amidst creatures without pausing, if he but uses them as a means, if he fails to find in them his repose as in an end, but desires to rest only in God—then he is in the way of truth and order; he is righteous and holy, because he is perfectly simple.

The Catechism expresses the same idea in saying: 'Man is created to know God, to love Him, and to serve Him, and thus to reach eternal life.'

Now, how refer to God our thoughts, and words, and actions? By our *intention*, that is, by the *motive* which determines our will to freely produce them. Our operations and our actions considered in themselves, independent of the motive which has prompted them, have, prop-

erly speaking, no moral value; they are bodies without souls.

The moral value is *in us*, in our free will, which is the soul of all that we do, and gives to our actions their meaning and their worth.

Men judge us according to the exterior, according to the words which they hear and the actions which they see. This is why they are so often unjust, severe, and illnatured.

But God judges us according to what He sees within; He looks on our heart, our will, our motive, our intention, and it is according to these that He approves or blames, rewards or punishes.

Such is the meaning of these words in the Gospel: 'If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome.' *

The eye signifies intention. For, just as the eye directs our steps, so does the intention guide the movements of our soul; the intention is the eye of our soul.† If our soul looks toward God, if she freely directs toward Him our thoughts, our words, our actions, then all that we do, all that we say, all that we think, becomes by this very fact supernatural and good; and the Gospel

* St. Matt. vi. 22, 23.

† 'Intention' is taken from *intueri*, which signifies 'to regard.'

expresses this in saying: 'Thy whole body shall be lightsome.'

Thus the merit of human actions lies wholly in the intention. Our actions have simply the value of our intention. In affirming this, the Gospel overthrows pharisaism, and at the same time substitutes the religion of the spirit and the veritable kingdom of God which is within us.

Thenceforth simplicity becomes the *soul of the spiritual life*, since it consists precisely in purity of intention. Simplicity gives to the life of the spirit all its depth and value. The simple soul is ever pleasing to God, because she ever looks toward Him, and seeks for Him always, having no ambition other than to do His Will in order to procure His glory.

To be simple is to see, love, and desire God in all creatures and in all things; it is to *unify* one's life with God.*

* 'The beauty of simplicity enraptures me,' says St. Francis of Sales, 'and I'd give at any time a hundred serpents for one dove.'

DEGREES OF SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER II

DEGREES OF SIMPLICITY

THERE are degrees in simplicity. Simplicity, as a matter of fact, is the more elevated and perfect, as in the first place the intention is more *effectively present*, and secondly, as the intention is more *pure*.

Simplicity asks, to begin with, the absolute exclusion from our intentions of all that would be *contrary* to the Divine Will, and, above all, *incompatible* with the possession of God, Who is our last end—in a word, all that theology calls sin, mortal or venial.

It further asks of us, in the case of an end permitted or even commanded by God, but which is *secondary*, that we should not attach ourselves thereto as to a *final* end, nor incline ourselves toward an earthly good, be it ever so legitimate, with a desire and a love which would cause us to *prefer* it to an eternal good.

But, apart from these exceptions, simplicity permits us all freedom concerning inferior and

secondary ends when they are legitimate; for example, to express our respect and love for our parents, our gratitude to our benefactors, our compassion for those who suffer.

It permits us to take measures to improve our health, to succeed in an examination, to advance in a career, to obtain lawful advantages. This is, indeed, all permitted, often praiseworthy, and sometimes commanded.

All these intentions are in the right order of things, because conformable to the Will of God. In pursuing them, it is ever God Whom we are seeking, and it is God Whom we please, if we are careful to refer all to Him.

Therefore, if we firmly determine to exclude all that is displeasing to God, to seek as a *secondary* end solely that which He permits or commands, to attach ourselves to Him only as to a *final* end; or, in other words, if, being in a state of grace, we generously accept all the obligations of a Christian life, having the sincere desire to offer all to God, our intention is pure, we effectively practice simplicity as long as our soul remains in this state and attitude, although we should not always be *actually* thinking of it. 'The traveller who is on the right road,' says St. Thomas, 'has no need to think at each step of his destination.' In like manner the soul which has the explicit and unchanging deter-

mination of reaching God, need not renew her intention for every act accomplished.

So long as the first intention has not been retracted, it *virtually* remains, according to the theologians, which means that *by its virtue* and its own force it enters into all our actions, penetrates them, and communicates its value to them. By reason of a definite and persevering intention the soul attains her end; she journeys to God, as a river in its course flows to the sea.

If we decide to act in all things for God, if we do not retract this first determination, if it has any influence whatsoever upon our actions, although we may not be actually conscious of it, we are on the right road, we approach our last end, we work for God; we already possess, in a certain degree at least, simplicity and purity of intention.

Nevertheless, if during our actions we often think of God, to offer all to Him; if frequently we revive in our hearts the desire to love Him and to please Him; if we renew *at the moment* our determination to refer all to Him—it is obvious that the *strength* and *intensity* of our intention is thereby increased, and the merit of our acts becomes accordingly greater. The more our intention is *present* and *intense*, the more our actions are holy, because inspired by a greater simplicity.

In like manner the *motives* which enter into the original intention to act for God have in themselves, and give to the intention and to the act, a most unequal value.

Thus you can have in view the acquisition of legitimate *temporal blessings*, and to this end may offer alms, prayers, and sacrifices.

This intention is praiseworthy, if accompanied by true submission to the Will of God. But it is the least perfect of all, because its object does not go beyond this world. You are at the lowest degree of simplicity, because your motive, although legitimate, is the least lofty of all.

You can act from *fear of the punishments* of God. If it were a cowardly fear, it would corrupt all. If you were only to avoid sin from fear of the punishment, in such a way as to wish that the punishment did not exist, in order that you might freely commit the sin, your intention would be evil and to be condemned.

But if your fear is *filial*, if you admit the propriety of God's punishment, if you avoid sin from fear of losing God, your intention is good. It is praised and commended by Scripture. You have already attained to a motive superior to the preceding one ; it is no longer temporal blessings which you covet, but spiritual blessings which you fear to lose.

If, further, you regard these *spiritual blessings*

in themselves with the *desire* to gain the promised *reward*, if you say with the Psalmist: 'I have inclined my heart to do thy justifications for ever for the reward,'* your intention rises higher and becomes better. It is already noble and very holy, for the reward promised to the righteous is God Himself, according to the promise given to Abram: 'I will be thy reward exceeding great.' †

Finally, you can act *directly for God*. Of all intentions this is obviously the most perfect. Moreover, this intention may be formulated in two different fashions.

You can, in the first place, purpose to please God, and so to *merit* His *favours* and *benefits*. Indeed, to act thus is to already love God, to love Him greatly and above all else.

There exists, however, an intention which is more lofty, more pure, because there exists a love which is more perfect. You can love God for *Himself alone*, without the slightest thought of self, without any touch of egoism. You can forget yourself, 'lose your soul,' as the Gospel says, in order to see only God.

It is no question of suppressing the virtue of hope to the advantage of charity; we would fall into an error condemned by the Church. We must desire God, seek Him, and hope for Him;

* Ps. cxviii. 112. † Gen. xv. 1.

and in reality, whether conscious of it or not, the soul hopes all the more as its love is greater.

Nevertheless, when the soul feels a great love for God, the moment comes when she forgets His gifts in contemplation of the Divine giver. She loves for the sake of loving, and serves for the sake of serving, heedless of the joy and blessings which such love and service will bring her.

'This act of love,' says Mgr. Gay, 'doubtless belongs to the soul which makes it, but it no longer has any place therein. God alone is all.'*

It is thus that the Saints have loved God; and it is because their love went to such lengths that they were Saints. Such generous impulses, divine oblivion, and total self-abnegation, such raptures of the heart and transports of pure love, are ever to be found in their lives and in their works.

David cried: 'For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth?'†

St. Bernard wrote: 'Pure love is not mercenary; it does not find its strength in hope; it is content to love.'‡

* 'Instructions pour les Personnes du Monde,' vol. ii., chap. v., 'Pureté d'Intention.'

† Ps. lxxii. 25.

‡ Sermon 83, 'On the Canticles.'

St. Thomas asked of God no other reward 'than Himself.'

St. John of the Cross went so far as to say: 'The true lover, even if he thought it possible that his good works might escape the eye of God, and pass unrewarded, would love God no less in consequence, and would do no less for Him.'*

And elsewhere: 'It is the property of perfect love to be unconcerned with self, neither to desire nor reserve aught for self, and to claim nothing for self, but to give all to the Beloved.'†

Such was the unchanging love of Mary; the eye of God never found within her heart the slightest shadow of self-interest or of vanity.

Such, above all, was the love of Jesus for His Father. 'Christ did not please Himself,'‡ says St. Paul, but always regarded the Divine Will; He never for one instant turned His attention therefrom, and could in truth say: 'I do always the things that please My Father.'§

Thus there are degrees in simplicity and purity of intention as there are degrees in love.

As the intention is more *pure* and more *present*, that is to say, as it turns *directly* and *vigorously* toward God, freeing itself from all other motives,

* Sentences.

† 'Explanation of the Canticle,' strophe 32.

‡ Rom. xv. 3. § St. John viii. 29.

the more perfect and pure becomes love, and the act accomplished the more meritorious and holy. Perfect simplicity, perfect purity of intention, therefore, constitute in effect the most perfect and pure love.*

* 'Simplicity is like water—the best is the most limpid, the least composite, the most pure. . . . The most adorable simplicity is daughter to Innocence and sister to Charity' (St. Francis of Sales).

THE DOVE AND THE EXHORTATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

CHAPTER III

THE DOVE AND THE EXHORTATIONS OF THE GOSPEL

YOU now understand why the Gospel takes the dove as the symbol at once of love and of simplicity. It is because pure love and perfect simplicity are one and the same thing.

Also, when the Holy Spirit—that is, the love of God—descended upon the Saviour on the day of His baptism, He appeared in the form of a dove.* And when the Divine Master wished to speak to His Apostles of simplicity, He found no better model to offer them than the dove, saying: 'Be ye simple as doves.'

The dove is the symbol of innocence, because it is incapable of wrong-doing or of malice. It is simple in its plumage, uniform in colour, neither too brilliant nor too dull, of a delicate shade which does not attract the eye, and yet, says Scripture, 'has a sheen of silver and gold.'

* St. Matt. iii. 16; St. Luke iii. 22.

It is simple in its food, eating only grain. Finally, it is simple in its flight; it does not whirl about, as do the lark and swallow. It begins by rising, takes its direction, and goes straight as an arrow. Without swerving either to right or left, it glides rather than flies.

Here, now, is the image of simplicity and of purity of intention. It is the flight of an innocent soul toward God. First she rises above all that is created and human; she frees herself by a generous effort, as by a vigorous stroke of the wing; then, looking neither to right nor left, neither to creatures nor to self, she sees naught but the end to which she aspires—God alone! This soul fixes her regard upon God, and goes to Him straight as an arrow. She is filled with a pure and perfect love of God. The Holy Spirit dwells within her.

And here we find the meaning of those words of the Imitation: 'By two wings a man is lifted up from things earthly—namely, by simplicity and purity. Simplicity ought to be in our intention, purity in our affection. Simplicity doth tend toward God, purity doth apprehend, and, as it were, taste Him.'*

Scripture speaks often of the dove. It is always used as the symbol of the pure and simple soul who seeks God alone.

* 'Imitation of Jesus Christ,' II., iv. 1.

When Noah* for the first time, from the ark, sent forth a dove, it immediately returned; and the second, which he sent soon after, again returned, bearing in its beak an olive-branch; while the raven, instead of going back, remained upon dry land.

The soul which is not simple willingly leaves God, she abandons Him to attach herself to the world and there to stay; whereas the simple soul but lightly grazes the earth, barely touches it; and if by God's will and ordinance she takes aught therefrom, at once she brings all back to Him, and returns to Him in joyous flight, unable to live without Him. 'Oh that I had the wings of a dove, that I might fly away and be at rest in God!'†

Thus God prefers the simple soul to all others; He becomes enamoured of it: 'How beautiful art thou, my love; how beautiful art thou!' He cries: 'Thy eyes are doves' eyes . . . thou hast wounded my heart, my sister, my spouse, with one of thy eyes, with one hair of thy neck.'‡

'Arise,' says Jesus, 'My dove, My love, My fair one, seek refuge in My wounds. Come, hide thyself in My heart.'§

After having depicted simplicity in the characteristics of the dove, the Holy Spirit exhorts us

* Gen. vi.-xii.
† Ps. liv. 7.
‡ Cant. iv., 1, 9.
§ Cant. ii., 13, 14.

to acquire it. 'As the eyes of a handmaid are on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes unto the Lord our God.'*

The hands are symbolic of the will. We command by a gesture of the hand. We guide by a touch of the hand on a horse's bridle, or the rudder of a boat. We say of a person with a strong will that he has a 'firm hand.'

The comparison of Scripture thus signifies that we must unceasingly look to the Will of God. We must seek His glory as our supreme end; but it is in doing His Will that we procure His glory.

The Holy Spirit also teaches us the happiness of the simple soul. He tells us: 'The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.'† 'As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God. . . .'‡ 'How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.'§ In all these inspired words, and in hundreds of others to be found in Scripture, is it not simplicity which is spoken of, and so highly praised?

The Gospel reverts to it often. 'Unless you

* Ps. cxxii. 2.
† Ps. xxii. 1, 2.
‡ Ps. xli. 2.
§ Ps. lxxxiii. 1, 2.

be converted and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.'*

What more pleasing image of simplicity than a little child, faultless as yet, and innocent of the world? He is wholly engrossed by his desires: be it his mother's breast, a plaything, a dainty, he sees nothing else; his eyes, his hands, his inarticulate cries, the agitation of his tiny body, all tend toward what he covets, for him naught else exists in the world; he is absorbed in his unique desire; all beyond disappears in his sight. And when gratified, see how he falls asleep, without a care, upon his mother's breast.

Thus the really simple soul sees only God, aspires only to God, and born upward toward Him by all her faculties, she 'also sleeps in peace upon His heart.'†

* St. Matt. xviii. 3.

† 'Here is the height of wisdom—simplicity united to prudence; therein is an angelic life.

'The soul of a child is free from all malice, he remembers no injuries, but treats as friends those who have caused him pain. Ill-treated by his mother, he still turns to her, and loves her always best. You might show him a queen in gorgeous raiment, but his mother in rags and tatters would still be first in his heart. He asks only the needful, and when satisfied he leaves the breast. He is untouched by the evils which overwhelm us, such as loss of fortune, etc. Unlike us, he finds no pleasure in vain things; he is unattracted by physical beauty.

The Gospel further says: 'So likewise every one of you that doth not renounce all that He possesseth, cannot be My disciple.'* And elsewhere: 'No man putting his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.'† Does not this say to us: Go to God, to Him alone? Let God suffice you, let Him be your all, let your eye be single?

The Gospel adds: 'Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice. . . .'‡ 'Seek ye therefore first the kingdom of God and His justice . . . be not solicitous for your life, what you shall eat, nor for your body, what you shall put on. . . . For your Father knoweth that you have need of all these things.'§ Does not this again say to us: Look upon God; content yourselves with God; practise simplicity?

And when Jesus speaks to Martha of the 'one

'And this is why Jesus said: "The kingdom of heaven belongs to such as are like unto little children." He commands us to do by will as do little children by instinct' ('St. John Chrysostom,' Homily LXII.).

'The Lord teaches us that, to enter into the kingdom of heaven, one must become again a little child—that is to say, to correct all the vices of body and soul by the simplicity of a child' (St. Hilary, 'Commentary on St. Matthew,' chap. xviii.).

* St. Luke xiv. 33.
† St. Luke ix. 62.
‡ St. Matt. v. 6.
§ St. Matt. vi. 25, 33.

thing necessary,'* and shows her Mary seated at His feet, her gaze fixed on Him, is it not once again the supreme importance of simplicity which He points out?

* St. Luke x. 42.

THE FRUITS OF SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER IV

THE FRUITS OF SIMPLICITY

A VIRTUE so enhanced, of such value, which is, as it were, the quintescence of Scripture and of the Gospel, and the very spirit even of the new religion taught by Christ, cannot fail to be fruitful. And truly the fruits of simplicity are marvellous.

The Gospel sums them up when it says: 'If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome. But if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome.'

These words give us two precious and very practical maxims.

In the first place, *without simplicity*, at least in a certain degree, it is *impossible to please God;* for if men see that which appears outwardly, God looks on the heart—namely, the intention which prompts our actions.

If you are slaves to public opinion, prejudice, and human respect; if you allow yourself to be led by a word, a glance, a smile; if you act for

the world—you cannot please God, you are no longer Christians. 'If I yet pleased men,' says St. Paul, 'I should not be the servant of Christ.'*

Even that which is good in itself could not please God without simplicity.

'Take heed that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them; otherwise you shall not have a reward of your Father Who is in heaven.'†

In the same way, if you act from egotistical motives, self-love, vain complacency, and personal satisfaction—if, in a word, you take the credit for the good that you do, or the virtues you practise, their intrinsic value is lost in God's sight. 'You put all into a bag with holes.'‡

You may multiply your prayers, make the longest meditations, the most frequent communions; you may, as says the Apostle,§ have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; you may give all your goods to the poor, and your body to be burnt, and by your charitable works merit the admiration of the whole world; and yet, if you do all this for your self, if your intention is a wholly selfish one, 'if you have not charity which alone renders the intention pure,' 'all that will profit you nothing.' All is lost before God, and worthless for your

* Gal. i. 10.
† St. Matt. vi. 1.
‡ Aggeus i. 6.
§ 1 Cor. xiii. 2, 3.

salvation. Your eye is not single, your body cannot be lightsome.

And what is more, if no action can please God unless it be referred to Him in all simplicity, an action *even good in itself* becomes *evil when the intention is evil:* 'If thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome.'

The Gospel charges us, it is true, to 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works,' but it immediately adds, 'that they may glorify your Father Who is in heaven.'*

We should edify our neighbour by our words, acts, and works; but we must not seek to gratify our vanity thereby. 'Our intention,' says St. Gregory, 'should remain hidden.'† We must refer all to God and to His glory, and not to our own.

If we seek our own glory and not that of God, even good becomes evil in God's sight. St. Vincent de Paul expresses this in the following words: 'It were better to be cast, bound hand and foot, upon red-hot coals, than to do a good work from vanity.'

On the contrary, by means of *simplicity*, all becomes clear, all is transformed, all becomes *profitable* and *good*, all is pleasing in God's sight.

* St. Matt. v. 16.

† 'The Gospel of St. Matthew,' Homily XI., Sect. VII., chap. xiii.

If the thought of duty inspires you, if you have in view the good of souls and the glory of God, if you sincerely seek the Will of your Father Who is in heaven, then all that you do takes on a supernatural value.

'If the root be holy,' says the Apostle, 'so are the branches.'* The duties of your position, your pious exercises, your good works, your family relations, your sorrows, your joys, your trials, your sufferings, your loneliness, your forced inactivity—all, in a word, without exception, becomes holy and agreeable to God by the purity of intention: 'If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome.'

If the eye be single—that is to say, without defect or blemish of any kind—if it be healthy, the light penetrates it, and illumines the whole body and its every movement.

Likewise, if your soul is simple—that is to say, healthy—the Divine light penetrates it. You see God, you comprehend Him, you do all in Him and for Him; all your thoughts, your words, your acts, become good and holy.

O admirable fruits of simplicity! O marvellous effects of a pure intention!

Things have no longer any value of their own; they take their value from the intention which inspires them. The widow's mite men-

* Rom. xi. 16.

tioned in the Gospel weighs more in God's sight than the vast sums given by the rich,* and a glass of water given in the name of Jesus Christ is the price of eternity.

'What, then, does it matter,' says St. Augustine, 'if your purse be small? You can give much with your heart and will by doing nothing save for God's good pleasure.'

Even the most ordinary and most material act may become spiritual and holy: 'Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever else you do, do all for the glory of God.'†

Finally, the intention has of itself such a value in the eyes of God that the *desire alone*, if sincere and true, is accounted as the act.

I have the firm intention to carry out a work of charity, but am prevented by circumstances beyond my control; if it had depended upon me, I should have accomplished it. My intention before God has the same value as the work itself. Hence the extreme importance in the spiritual life of holy desires, and the unthinkable riches to which they can lead.

St. Mary Magdelen de Pazzi relates how in a vision of St. Aloysius Gonzaga he appeared in wondrous glory. And amazed that a Saint who died so young could have acquired so high a degree of merit, God revealed to her that this

* St. Mark xii. 41. † 1 Cor. x. 31.

exceptional glory was due to the intensity and ardour of his desires—which is to say, the simplicity and purity of his intentions.

It is by simplicity that the righteous man, 'being made perfect in a short space, fulfills a long time,'* because he lives uniquely for God, and seeks only to please Him.

Simplicity makes of our life one continual homage to God; it supernaturalizes and sanctifies our works, words, and thoughts, our most secret desires, and the slightest movements of our heart.

And simplicity produces still other admirable effects.

It gives to the soul those two excellent qualities which St. Theresa declared indispensable to beginners in the spiritual life—namely, *joy* and *liberty of spirit.*

The most generous soul, if she be not simple, is troubled, anxious, and endlessly discouraged.

Her very generosity sometimes inclines her to be scrupulous, and under pretext of *delicacy* warps her conscience. 'Am I not deceived?' she cries. 'Has God forgiven me? Should I in truth do this? Am I in the right path?' She is continually asking herself a thousand disturbing and confusing questions.

By dint of self-introspection she ends by losing

* Wisd. of Sol. iv. 13.

her clearness of vision. She inevitably falls into a profound melancholy, a fatal discouragement.

The simple soul escapes all such dangers because she looks to God far more than to creatures, and places herself above all that obscures, fatigues, and exasperates the soul which is not simple.

The first is represented in the Gospel by Martha, who was restless, anxious, and concerned with many things. The simple soul is represented by Mary, tranquilly seated at the feet of the Master, drinking in each word, and solely mindful of His pleasure. The simple soul has found 'the better part,' 'the one thing necessary'; she is wholly given to God.

Without self-preoccupation, without artifice or hypocrisy, without subterfuge or dissimulation, without fear of the world's opinion, speaking as she thinks, her heart in one sense on her sleeve, she is always calm and tranquil; she goes on her way unanxious and untroubled, her spirit free, and her heart full of joy and peace. Neither lack of success, contempt, gossip, trials, nor even her own falls, sins, and imperfections—nothing in this world can disturb her. She has found 'the peace which Jesus gives,' 'the joy that none can take away.'

In a modern play we are shown a princess who lives in a wonderful castle. Covered as she

is with diadems, jewels, precious stones, sumptuous ornaments, she is not happy. Her soul aspires to something higher; she is materially and morally crushed by the luxury with which she is adorned.

Walking one day in this brilliant attire, she meets a troop of poor, ragged creatures, men, women, and children, pale-faced and dying of hunger. Filled with emotion and pity, by a sudden and generous impulse she takes all her treasures, all these priceless objects with which she is covered, and distributes them amongst these unfortunates, crying, 'Ah! now I am free and happy!'

Simplicity frees the soul from the burden, sometimes crushing, of the things of this world; it delivers her from the many vain anxieties so hard to bear. It makes her light, free, and joyous.

And, further, simplicity produces *sincerity*, and utterly destroys the evil which is perhaps most to be dreaded for the soul's progress—namely, illusion.

Father Faber, that profound psychologist, in a long chapter on illusions, after having shown the extent of the harm they do in the domain of spiritual life, declares that simplicity is the only remedy for this terrible and universal evil.

The souls who examine themselves most

closely are not those who know themselves the best, nor, above all, those who correct themselves most quickly. By dint of unbandaging a wound in order to see if it has healed, you end by aggravating it. You cause an irritation.

On the contrary, the soul who looks to God rapidly learns self-knowledge, and, what is much more important, detachment.

God is truth; by contemplating Him, the soul becomes like to Him. The simple soul knows herself at a glance; and if it happens that in certain hours of fatigue or forgetfulness she touches earth, no sooner conscious of this than up she rises by a stroke of the wing, and soars rapidly away to the highest regions, from whence a moment's carelessness had caused her fall.

The simple soul knows herself because she knows God, Who is pure light, and Who enlightens her conscience. She despises and flees from herself, in proportion as she seeks God and loves Him. The simple soul, being sincere, is also *generous* in the effort to overcome herself.

The majority of your faults come from a lack of simplicity. When you are given over to envy and jealousy, when you are agitated, tortured, sometimes by violent desires or human affections of a too absorbing nature, you are the

reverse of simple, for you look only to the creature, and the simple soul sees only God.

Simplicity makes the soul generous; it unifies her operations, strengthens her courage, revives her ardour. It prompts the soul to the noblest enterprises, and keeps her from all fatigue. Like the dove, seemingly effortless in its flight through space, nothing troubles the simple soul. God bears her up, and Himself accomplishes in her the great things which she does: *fecit mihi magna qui potens est.**

Simplicity *edifies* your neighbour, because it is the source of a sweet nature, serenity, kindness, affability, and all those lovable and attractive virtues which charm, repose, inspire confidence, and do real good.

In the soul which lacks simplicity there is always something egotistical and selfish, which comes out in her attitude and bearing, her manners, her words, and her actions.

The simple are disconcerting in their *humility* and *self-forgetfulness*. They make us feel God and touch Him. Beside them one is safe, one cannot approach or see them without being the better for it. They little suspect the good they do, or find it most surprising. And the more unconscious they are the more good done,

* 'Because He that is mighty has done great things to me' (St. Luke i. 49).

accordingly as there is less of self and more of God. All their actions are blessed, because they are done in the spirit of God and for love of Him.

Finally, we could never tell the *joy* which they give to God, and the *glory* they procure for Him. At each instant of the day and night they sanctify the name of God, and extend His reign, because at each instant they do His Will.

Even their rest and sleep become a hymn to the praise of the Most High; for, 'if she sleep her heart watcheth,'* always by the persevering purity of their intention.

Spotless doves, they unceasingly ravish the heart of their Divine Spouse; and it is in Him, in the sacred wounds received for love of us, that they take up their abode and find their rest after the day's long flight.

* Cant. v. 2.

THE SIGNS OF SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER V

THE SIGNS OF SIMPLICITY

SINCE you know what simplicity is, and the fruits thereof, do you not also wish to become 'simple as doves'? But how tell if you have acquired this simplicity? By four principal signs.

The first is *indifference to your own success.*

When you do not succeed in an undertaking, whether it concerns your family, the education and future of your children, duties toward your husband, the management of your house and servants, or be it something abroad, touching family connections, almsgiving, visits to the poor, or perhaps a conversion, what is it that troubles and discourages you? It is the failure to achieve the sought-for end, a legitimate end doubtless, but human. You have had in view the result, the *success*, the work in itself. You have failed in purity of intention.

It is plain, indeed, that if your intention had been pure, if you had sought before all the good-

will and pleasure of God, you would say to yourself: Since God has not willed this result, neither will I; and, moreover, if I have acted for God, if I have sought to please Him, I most certainly have succeeded, and God must be content, for I have done what I could, all in my power. Therefore I should be satisfied, and as calm as though success had crowned my efforts.

Indifference to the success of our undertakings is a necessary and certain sign of purity of intention.

The second sign is *joy in the success of others or in their spiritual progress.*

If your intention is straightforward and pure, you must desire all that honours, rejoices, and glorifies God. If those about you do good, and more than you do; if, in the same work, another is more successful than you; if a work of the same sort as yours is more prosperous than your own, or prospers at the expense of yours, you should feel neither offence, nor jealousy, nor bitterness, nor sorrow, but should sincerely rejoice from the bottom of your heart, since God is thereby glorified.

Those who are exclusive, who think only of their own works, and of their own part therein, and who, with ill-disguised vexation, find everywhere competitors and rivals whom they would

like to banish or eclipse, are certainly lacking in purity of intention.

In the same way, if the sight of another who, by dint of effort, improves and becomes better, annoys and irritates you—I am not speaking of a noble and holy emulation, which is legitimate and good—but if something in you would prevent this progress which is vexing to you, then you are lacking in purity of intention.

Purity of intention may be recognized by the sincere and veritable joy that we feel—or at least that we *freely wish* to feel by scorning any adverse feeling—at the thought of another's progress, or in view of the good that we see them accomplish.

The third sign of purity of intention is freedom from all *wilful preference for any one thing*, from all *decided attachment to anything*.

You may have inclinations either of nature or of grace. You may feel spontaneously attracted to this or to that. Certain are more drawn toward an interior life, others to an active life; some to visit the poor, others to nurse the sick, to instruct children and those who are backward. But you should be prepared, if necessary, and your superiors ask it of you, readily to sacrifice your personal tastes, to give yourselves up to whatever obedience exacts of you.

You should so uniquely attach yourself to the

Will of God, that, once clearly manifested, you will be ready generously to accept it, in spite of all reluctance and the necessary sacrifice of your own inclinations.

Attachment to the *Will* of God *above* all things is the third sign of purity of intention.

The fourth sign is neither to *desire* nor *court* the *praise* and *approbation* of men for the good that you do, and to *retain your calm* and *interior peace*, if, on the contrary, you receive only *reproaches* and *blame*.

You must say to yourself: If I have done my duty and accomplished the Will of God, it is all that I desired, nothing else matters to me.

If you do not find in your heart these four signs of purity of intention, if one alone is lacking, or if you find them incomplete or imperfect, it proves that your intentions are not wholly pure, and that there is some flaw in your simplicity, or that perhaps you are entirely lacking in this virtue.

You must strive to acquire it, daily to advance in it; and in order that it may bear all its fruits, and that most abundantly, strive to acquire it in the highest degree and in the fulness of its perfection.

You should have the heart of that woman of whom St. Liguori tells that a Dominican on pilgrimage with St. Louis found her in Pales-

tine, holding in one hand a vase filled with water, and in the other a burning torch. Asked by the friar their meaning, she replied: 'With this water I would extinguish the fires of hell, and with this torch destroy the heavens, that henceforth God might no longer be served from fear of hell, or hope of heaven, but solely for love.'

You should forever exclaim with St. Bernard: 'May I love Thee, Lord, for Thyself alone! Not for the happiness of loving Thee, but solely to do Thy good pleasure, and to content Thy heart!'

We should be able to say with the Divine Master: 'I seek not My own will, but the will of Him that sent Me; for I do always the things that please Him.'*

Then only will you have perfect simplicity.

* St. John viii. 29.

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY TOWARDS GOD

CHAPTER VI

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY TOWARDS GOD

LET us now enter into detail, and in some sort draw the portrait of simplicity, covering the vast field wherein you are called to exercise it.

You should practise simplicity towards *God*, towards *yourself*, and towards your *neighbour*.

Simplicity is the perfection of your relation to God. 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect,'* said God to Abram. The simple soul follows this Divine counsel and carries out this admirable programme.

She walks before God; she is conscious of His presence. She ever sees Him; she has but one desire, that of pleasing God.

She understands the exceptional importance of *pious exercises*. She clings to them for no sensible attraction—ever liable to come and go—but by the free effort of a resolute and persevering will. She does not seek therein her own satis-

* Gen. xvii. 1.

faction, her rest, her immediate reward, as would a hireling. She seeks but the Will and the Glory of God.

If she finds sensible consolation, sweetness, and joy, far from rejecting such favours, she receives them with gratitude for God's goodness.

But she does not rest in them with complacency, nor count upon them. She loves God more than all His gifts, and instead of attributing these Divine graces to herself, she turns all to the Glory of God.

The simple soul is more apt in *contemplation* than in *meditation*. Before a work of art, a marvellous picture, you forget yourself. You are absorbed by what you see; in an instant all the faculties of your soul are ravished, and in a way suspended, until, finally, you come back to earth.

The simple soul never tires of admiring the eternal and infinite Beauty. Sometimes she sees it in God Himself, sometimes in the humanity of Christ, as in a spotless mirror.

She never argues, seldom reasons; she looks, she contemplates, she escapes from self to be absorbed and lost in God.*

* 'The soul must be ever steadfast in prayer,' says St. Francis of Sales, 'and neither permitted to note what she does nor find satisfaction therein. Alas! our satisfactions and consolations, far from pleasing God, only

In the case of the Saints this goes to the length of transports and ecstacies. Borne away on simplicity's powerful wings, they penetrate to the very heart of the Divinity. Thus in days of yore the prophet Daniel was seized, ravished, and overcome because, says Scripture, he was 'a man of desires,'* that is to say, a man wholly simple, desiring only God.

If the simple soul finds in prayer only dryness, if she is as 'in a desert land, where there is no way and no water,'† she is not discouraged. She sees the Will of God in these grievous trials, and loses nothing of her calm and peace.

If the duties of her state or unforeseen circumstances, if charity or illness, something, in a word, willed by God, prevents her from applying herself to her customary pious exercises, and obliges her even to discontinue her communions, she is neither troubled nor discouraged. She recalls the reply of Our Lord to Père Alverez, who, overwhelmed with occupations, complained that he had no time for prayer: 'When I no longer abide with you, let it suffice that I make use of you.'

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satisfy our own miserable self-love. She who is very careful lovingly to please Jesus Christ has neither heart nor time to turn toward self; her spirit ever tends where love carries it' (Entretien XIII,).

* Dan. ix. 23. † Ps. lxii. 3.

When a soul is not simple, the absence of her director disconcerts and discourages her.

The simple soul overcomes these difficult moments without decrease of fervour, as the dove crosses a misty region without losing her way or retarding her flight.

And if death or a definitive event obliges the simple soul to change her director, she neither hesitates nor delays, but places herself confidently in the hands of the new guide sent her by Providence.

The simple soul is admirable in her *faith* and *piety* towards the Church, the Sacraments, and all things holy.

Her faith cannot be shaken. Save by the express Will of God, who sanctifies the most holy souls by trying them, doubt is unknown to her. Her faith is clear and cloudless, pure and upright. Her submission to all the teachings of the Church is ready, joyous, filial, and complete.

In the confessional she sees God in the priest. She accuses herself without agitation, confusion, or reservation. She says neither more nor less, neither too much nor too little, she says that which is, and as it is.

She speaks to Jesus, and it is He Whom she hears; she is yielding and ready to learn, perfectly humble and obedient.

During the Absolution she sees the blood of

Jesus flowing over her, she is filled with contrition, gratitude, and love. She emerges from this saving flood renewed with more strength to overcome herself, more devotion in the service of others.

During Mass she is on Calvary, at the foot of the Cross She sees Jesus raise His bleeding arms towards His Father, Jesus Who pardons, blesses, and prays, Who suffers, and Who dies.

When she receives Communion the whole of heaven comes down into her heart; 'she is bathed in the flames of love.'*

She is overwhelmed with joy and happiness. She is wholly absorbed by the marvels which take place within her. It is with a mighty effort that she tears herself from her thanksgiving. She is all inflamed, consumed by the fires of Divine love.

Grace works in this soul without opposition the most wonderful transformations. She ever advances in virtue before God and man. She is 'the sweet odour of Christ'† to those who come near her. Seeking God alone in the Sacraments and the Church, she finds Him therein, and in superabundance.

* Curé d'Ars. † 2 Cor. ii. 15.

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY TOWARDS OURSELVES

CHAPTER VII

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY TOWARDS OURSELVES

WITH relation to herself the simple soul is *both sincere* and *courageous*.

She is not forever multiplying her examinations of conscience, nor looking into her own heart; but her glance is penetrating, rapid, and profound.

Her conscience is without secrets, hidden corners, darkness, or even shadow. All is in a bright light—the light of God. She has no need of lengthy self-analysis, nor to argue with herself; a hasty survey shows her what she is.

Without often regarding herself, she knows herself perfectly, and, what is far better, corrects herself. She sets herself right, and transforms herself, because she despises and shuns herself.

Many seek contrition in the consideration of their faults, and the ugliness of sin and its consequences.

The simple soul draws contrition chiefly from

the contemplation of God, in the view of her own offences against the Divine Majesty, and the sorrow which she has caused to the heart of God.

When Peter had denied his Master, a glance from Jesus pierced his heart through, and drew therefrom an inexhaustible source of tears.

The simple soul looks at Jesus, and Jesus looks at her, and His glance, like a fiery arrow, penetrates her with sorrow and repentance. Her contrition is the higher and more perfect because inspired by pure love.

Also her generosity is incredible, and her progress marvellous. As fire melts ice and consumes straw, as the sun instantaneously dispels the *heaviest* mist and shows forth the blue depths of a cloudless sky, so does simplicity dispel indifference and tepidity, so destroy sin and curb all unruly inclinations with prodigious ease and promptitude, because simplicity is the practice and the very act of pure love.

The simple soul, after freeing herself from sin, mounts rapidly toward God, as the dove with a vigorous stroke of the wing at once soars away to the loftiest regions.

The simple soul retains her simplicity even in her *desire for perfection.*

There are generous souls who passionately long for perfection, and ardently endeavour to

attain it. But the ever-watchful enemy is there, and unable to tempt them by evil means, tempts them, as St. Ignatius points out, 'under the appearance of good.'

To this desire for perfection you bring too great an eagerness, a restlessness and agitation in which there is something of self. You desire perfection for itself or for yourself more than for God, and the self-love which enters into this effort of the soul corrupts its purity, and by so much diminishes its value.

Be simple, therefore, in your desire for perfection. 'Rise not till ye have rested,'* says Scripture; which is to say, do not be in too great a hurry; 'don't outdistance Providence,' as St. Vincent de Paul used to say. You must desire perfection only in the measure that God wills it for you.

'Spiritual lovers, spouses of the Celestial King,' says St. Francis of Sales, 'do not purify themselves to be pure, nor do they adorn themselves to be beautiful, but solely to please their Celestial Spouse. Their confidence in His goodness relieves them of all eagerness and mistrust of not being sufficiently beautiful, and makes them content with a quiet, faithful, and conscientious preparation.'

Nevertheless, do not *limit* the intensity of

* Ps. cxxvi. 2.

your desires, provided that you keep them always wholly subject to God's good pleasure. St. Theresa encouraged her daughters to carry their desires of perfection to the highest possible degree, and God incites us all thereto.

And, furthermore, you must desire to reach perfection, not according to the ways and means suggested by your scanty wisdom, nor according to your own designs and plans, but always and in all things *according to the adorable designs* of the Eternal Wisdom and the inscrutable way of the Infinite Goodness. In a word, never seek to follow your own lights in these labyrinths, where all human science goes astray, but by an act of total self-abnegation 'rest your heart in the Lord,' and, as the Gospel says, 'lose your life to save it'*; this is the fullest expression of simplicity.

It unites us so fully in all things to the Will of God, that it realizes the prayer of Our Lord at the Last Supper: 'My Father . . . may they be one as We also are one: I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be made perfect in one.'†

* St. Mark viii. 35. † St. John xvii. 22, 23.

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY IN THE FAMILY

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY IN THE FAMILY

THE simple soul is no less admirable in her dealings with her neighbour.

In the bosom of her family the *girl* who is simple is full of respect, submission, affection, and confidence, because she sees God in her kindred.

She gladly accepts the *natural* authority of her father and mother. She realizes what gratitude she owes them for all that they do for her. She bows before their wisdom and experience. She is stranger to none of these lofty and legitimate thoughts.

But, above all, she sees in her parents' direction and in their desires the *authority* of *God*, and it is chiefly because of God and for love of Him that she fulfils all her duties towards them.

If in her father and mother she notices some imperfection, fault, or even actual sin, she turns away, and, like Noah's sons, covers their faults, their vanity, or their shame, with the mantle of

the Divine majesty, which they represent in our regard, that she may ever, and in spite of all, preserve an inviolable and sacred respect for those who have given her life.

A mother most rightfully desires the *confidence* of her daughter, for confidence is made up of respect and tenderness, freedom and frankness; it, in a way, combines all the sentiments of a girl for her mother.

Now, if a girl is simple, she will surely be trusting, unless—which God forbid—her mother proves wholly unworthy.

Simplicity gives to a girl all her *charm*, and the fulness of grace which God has reserved for her, just as its lack brings her down from her pedestal, uncrowns and disfigures her.

For example, here is a girl who is sad and morose; she rarely smiles, and then with bitterness. A trifle wounds her; she is more than sensitive, and exasperated by the slightest reproach. Always distrustful, she thinks herself misunderstood by everyone, and doesn't realize that she is incomprehensible. She is absorbed in constant self-introspection, lost in profound and endless reverie—*i.e.*, egotistical and frivolous, vain and self-centred—lacking in respect, submission, and the spirit of sacrifice; she is disagreeable to all, and habitually ill-tempered.

How shall we explain this combination of

faults, which destroy the spontaneity, gaiety, and charm of her age, and make her a burden and trial to all those about her? How account for all this? By the lack of simplicity.

Instead of looking at God and finding her inspiration in Him, she sees only self. A constant and miserable self-preoccupation is the unvarying foundation of all her interests, her affections and her whole life making her insufferable in disposition and in person.

Now, in contrast, let us take the girl who is simple. She is forgetful of self, and sees only God, her neighbour, her duty. Her soul, innocent and pure, is untouched by evil; she is unconscious of it.

A constant thought for the comfort of others, a desire to save them the slightest anxiety, a smiling kindliness, a devotion as tactful as it is willing, a serenity of soul which freely imparts itself, a transparency of regard and a purity of conduct which remind one of the angels, together with a nobility of sentiment and a most touching high-mindedness—such are the ornaments with which simplicity adorns her.

Her soul, as of crystal, is a mirror, wherein God is reflected like the sun in the clear and tranquil waters of some fair lake. She enlightens, stimulates, and animates all who approach her. She gives them, as it were,

a foretaste of heaven, for heaven is in her heart.

She is a comfort and a joy to her parents, an example and a support to her brothers and sisters, a treasure to her family, and a sight for the angels.

Oh, mothers! simplicity is the greatest grace which you can ask for your daughters, a grace which will prove the source of all virtue.

The *wife* who is simple sees God in her husband. All her natural affection for him is still further strengthened and enhanced by the thought of God, Whose place he holds for her, and Whose authority she reverences in him. Thus her respect is deeper, her confidence greater, her tenderness more ardent, her love more steadfast, her devotedness more ready, and her fidelity more sacred.

This dove-like simplicity, moreover, is wonderfully combined with the prudence of the serpent, as the Gospel requires. Although full of confidence in her husband, she is by no means blind to his weakness, and, far from needlessly exposing him to temptation, she knows how to shield and protect him, and with tact and vigilance avert all possible danger.

She understands her moral and spiritual responsibility with regard to her husband, and

feels she must help him the better to know, love, and serve God; this thought is the soul of all sentiment and duty, and keeps her affection steadfast and true.

She is attached to her husband with an unchanging love which increases as years go by. But she loves without weakness his veritable good, the good of his soul, with his spiritual progress ever in view. She considers his soul above all, and without hesitation prefers it, if need be, to his worldly happiness. She is, for him, the virtuous companion, the sacred friend, the woman pre-eminently 'good,' *mulier fortis*, of whom the Scripture says, 'her husband's heart rests in her,' and that she is for him 'a treasure.'

The *mother* who is simple is the best of all *teachers*. For is not the whole aim of education to make children simple, to give them the habit of acting for God?

How false are those systems which foster vanity, the love of pleasure, the hope of immediate reward, self-interest, and so many other purely human motives, which may perhaps inspire a passing desire to do better, but will never inculcate solid and lasting habits of virtue, and in the end inevitably produce the worst of results!

When the passions awake, and dangerous occasions present themselves, when the exam-

ples and enthusiasms of life in the world, together with insidious temptations and difficult duties, make themselves felt, what will become of these souls who have not been steeped in the fear and the love of God? They will fall a defenceless prey to depravity and sin.

Only those souls trained up in the sight of God, with a conscience anchored in Him, and a character formed in the broad evangelical school of simplicity, can hold their own against the trials of this world, and reach at last, unharmed by so many dangers, an eternity of bliss.

Simplicity is the lever of all education. Without it no serious moral formation can ever exist. We too often forget this, but its absence is the reason why such training sometimes leads to destruction, why so many young people are a sorrow to their mothers, and explains the downfalls and scandals, the deserted firesides and desolate souls which we so often see.

If with the first awakening of reason a mother knew how to put God in the mind and the heart of her child, if she spoke to him of God in the way that she should; if she made him understand from his earliest age the one thing necessary, if as his greatest punishment she were able to say: 'My child, you have saddened the heart of God!' this child would soon become a man, his conscience would become

manly, or rather divine, and at the age of temptation and conflict, protected by his long Christian training, he would not betray his God ; or if, overcome by momentary weakness, he should inadvertently yield to an especially formidable attack, an unusually powerful impulse, he would return to God, as did Peter after the glance of Jesus, with profound sorrow, and would atone for his fault by a boundless generosity.

Oh, mothers! if you would have your children your joy, and a joy to God, be simple, and make them so. Simplicity is the armour which God offers to those whom He would render invincible, but it remains for mothers to clothe themselves and their children therein.

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY IN THE WORLD

CHAPTER IX

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY IN THE WORLD

IN the world simplicity is the distinguishing mark of a true Christian, for the spirit of the world is in effect a spirit of *duplicity* and *falsehood*.

What falsehood and duplicity we find in appearances! Beneath a courteous and pleasing exterior what meanness, vulgarity, and baseness often lurk. Each one dissembles and disguises her true self, and all wear a mask in order to appear other than they are.

What perpetual contradiction beneath the smiling words and the true feelings of their hearts! They flatter out of vanity, and praise from self-interest those to whom they look for certain advantages; whereas in reality they are jealous, and despise and detest them. They dishonour the sacred terms of affection and love, using them to cloak the most dangerous liberties, contemptible vanities, and abject pleasures.

That world which Jesus Christ condemns,

saying 'that it is altogether evil,' and for which He 'could not pray,' is diametrically opposed to simplicity. Every eccentricity, defect, and hypocrisy are therein to be found.

Indeed, we might say of certain assemblies that they were made up of a strange collection of birds—of *peacocks*, who strut about that they may be admired; of *parrots*, who senselessly repeat at random what they have heard; of *magpies*, who chatter and annoy by torrents of piercing, spiteful words; of *vultures*, who devour the honour and reputation of their neighbour; of *ravens*, who thrive on all that is shameful; of *ducks* and *hens*, who puff and blow and patter about in the vulgarity of the common place—in short, of every sort of bird, symbolic of depravity, baseness, and sin.

Only the dove, the simplicity of the Gospel, is absent, or at least only to be found in the person of the true Christian; and what a contrast she is to her surroundings—how restful, how beneficent!

She who is simple has a fund of seriousness and earnestness which keeps her from talking thoughtlessly and from talking too much. She neither gossips, flatters, slanders, deceives, nor poses.

She appears what she is, and she speaks as she thinks. Always kind and charitable at heart, because she sees her neighbour in God,

and God in her neighbour; she never speaks ill of others, because she never thinks ill of them.

She is neither indifferent nor unfeeling regarding the interests of those about her; on the contrary, she loves them with all her heart, because God commands it.

Now, in the love of the unsimple soul for her neighbour there is a large proportion of self-interest, whereas she who is simple loves her neighbour for himself more than for her own satisfaction, and loves him still further for God. She loves as God loves, which means that her love is most pure and most perfect.

She has a horror of sin, but, like Our Lord, she feels neither contempt nor aversion for the sinner. She is full of indulgence and kindness for all, without ever seeming to encourage or approve of evil and evildoers.

Subject like all of us to temptation, she does not consent, but combats and subdues within herself that which she keeps from appearing without. She is simple because her words come from her heart.

Ever thoughtful of God's good pleasure, purity reigns in her conversation, as in her bearing and in her manner of dress, always natural and genuine, because her sentiments are just and charitable, being the sentiments of God, upon Whom she models herself in all things.

Finally, she can be trusted to keep a secret; she is discretion itself without ceasing to be simple, because discretion could never be an enemy to truth.

Thus we see reserve and sincerity, humility, purity, charity and amiability, kindness and goodness, all naturally thrive in the soul who is simple.

Then, again, she inspires an absolute confidence. All are drawn, irresistibly impelled, towards her. Simplicity gives her a moral ascendancy and an authority which she ever uses for good.

She who is simple is as correct and modest in person and dress as the worldly woman is the contrary.* There is as a reflection of God on her brow, in her eyes, and in her whole bearing.

As she looks at God, so God looks at her, and 'makes the light of His countenance to shine upon her.' She is beautiful with a beauty not of this world; simplicity is her sole adornment.

Ah! the beauty of this world, a goddess impious and impure, to whom women sacrifice so much of time and money and countless noble qualities, and, alas! too often their whole soul and their eternity—simplicity will make you see her as

* 'I should like to see my "devotee" the most charming and the best decked out of all the company, if always in good taste and with simplicity' (St. Francis of Sales).

she is, and will make you despise her as the scum of the earth. You will fear her and flee from her as from something loathsome.

If you are simple, you will fear this earthly beauty as a peril for you, a danger for others, a device and a snare of Satan, an instrument of sin and perdition. If you are simple, you will ardently long for a different beauty beside which all the united beauties of this earth are as less than nothing. This superior beauty, which is born of virtue and the presence of God in a soul, His reflection on a countenance; this beauty, made up of humility and sweetness, kindness and goodness, modesty and grace, charity and self-forgetfulness; this beauty which makes you like unto Christ, inspires respect and confidence, banishes all thought of evil, and attracts and charms in order to raise all up to God.*

* 'The simplicity of the righteous is ridiculed. Here is the wisdom of the world: To cover with disguises the depths of the heart; to hide our thoughts beneath our words; to prove true that which is false, and false that which is true. We love this iniquitous duplicity, and present it under a borrowed name, calling politeness what is only perversity of mind. This depravity commands its slaves to seek the highest honours, to find joy and vanity in temporal glory, to return evil with interest, to give way to no one when one has strength, and when strength is lacking to make up for the evil one cannot achieve in assuming the appearance of peaceful benignity.

'Here, on the contrary, is the wisdom of the righteous (to wit, simplicity): To pretend nothing; to speak as you think; to love what is true, avoid what is false; do good gratuitously, bear evil more willingly than do it, seek no revenge for injuries suffered, and consider it a privilege to be outraged for truth's sake.

'But this simplicity of the righteous is ridiculed, for the wise of this world regard purity of intention as folly. All that is innocent seems to them senseless, and all that which truth approves appears foolishness to their worldly wisdom.

'What is more senseless in the eyes of the world than to speak as you think, to disguise nothing by skilful contriving, to return good for evil, to pray for those who curse you, to seek poverty, to abandon your goods, to offer no resistance to the despoiler, and to turn the other cheek to the enemy?' (St. Gregory, 'Commentary on Job').

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY IN ALL THINGS

CHAPTER X

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY IN ALL THINGS

SIMPLICITY will illumine and transform everything in your sight, making you see all in the light of God.

It will show you the *true end of life* in the 'one thing necessary' of the Gospel, and will detach you from pleasure, success, riches, and all the vanities of this world.

It will show you *sin* as the enemy of God, the irreconcilable adversary of Jesus Christ, the only evil to be feared. But it will take from your heart all hatred of the Church's persecutors; it will fill you with compassion for them. It will make you see in them creatures whose misfortune is even greater than their guilt; blind, lost souls on the road to hell and deserving of all pity.*

Simplicity will make you most careful to avoid all occasions of sin. Mistrustful of self, but con-

* 'If,' said God to St. Catherine of Siena, 'you witness an undeniable sin, you must separate the rose from its thorns, offering the sinner to Me with a holy and fraternal compassion.'

fident in the all-powerful protection of God, it will keep you safe in the midst of the most overwhelming temptations. It will be for you the ivory tower from within whose safe shelter you may defy the attacks of the enemy. 'He who walks in simplicity, walks in perfect safety.'*

Simplicity will help you marvellously in *suffering*. You will no longer find it a crushing burden, an irritating, depleting wound, an insurmountable obstacle to perfection.

If you are simple, you will see suffering in the light of God's love and goodness. You will see in it, as it were, a mysterious remedy which God in His infinite love has chosen to make use of to wipe out and destroy your sins, to fill your heart with supernatural riches, to unite you more closely to Jesus Christ, that you may co-operate with Him in the redemption of the world.

Simplicity will help you in all the trials of life. That which seems long to unsimple souls will to you seem short; what is to them an eternity will be for you but as a moment.

That which troubles, disconcerts, discourages, and disheartens them, making them bitter, irritable, and dissatisfied, will leave you calm and peaceful.†

* Prov. x. 9.

† 'Those souls which are simple preserve their peace amidst disturbance and sorrow' (St. Vincent de Paul).

Those lofty snow-crowned summits, distinguished by their dazzling whiteness from the mountain peaks they overshadow when the storm bursts and descends upon them, are no less near to heaven, no less firm and serene, than when bathed in the light of an azure sky.

And so it is with those souls whom simplicity has raised to union with God. They overcome the trials of life by their matchless purity; in anguish they retain their calm and peace, dwelling ever as close to God as in the happiest days.

Moreover, when the storm has passed, the sky above those snow-peaks is clearer, the air more transparent, the light more penetrating, making them more beautiful than before. And thus it is that simple souls when tried by suffering take on in God's sight a new and splendid beauty, a transparent purity hitherto unknown to them.

Simplicity will not keep you from suffering, but will so change your suffering that you will no longer recognize it. You will no longer suffer in the same way.

You will no longer, as do worldly people, make an ideal of *not* suffering. You will no longer say triumphantly: 'He died without suffering! He never knew He was dying!' As though suffering were the only evil in the world.

Your point of view will be more lofty. You

will condemn and detest such suffering only as it is apart from God, which is against Him; the suffering of the 'bad thief.'

But you will be able to accept for yourself and those dear to you the 'blessed suffering' when it pleases God to send it to you, and in the measure He wills that you should bear it.

You will make use of it and transform it; or, better still, it will, when received in the spirit of simplicity, transform *you*, and make you like Jesus, by piercing your hands and feet, lacerating your body, covering your head with wounds, and opening and penetrating your heart.

Thus accepted, suffering will lose all bitterness, it will become sweet, and you will feel the truth of 'All tears are dried at the feet of Jesus, and all sorrows soothed and lulled to sleep in His Divine embrace.' *

Simplicity will transform your whole *outlook* by putting you in the right, whether in questions of joy or of sorrow.

It will make you see clearly that your only real sorrow should be to offend God, to displease Him, to sadden His heart; or that others should offend, dishonour, and forsake Him. All this is what will wring tears from your eyes, and, if you become sufficiently holy, would cause you a sort of perpetual anguish like that of Our Lord.

* Mgr. Bougaud.

Full of this thought, the Curé d'Ars proclaimed himself the most wretched of men, complaining that he constantly lived amongst sinners, and heard from morning till night of the affronts offered to God. 'Sinners,' he cried, 'will cause the death of the sinner!'

How far removed you are from such feelings; humble yourself at least for your lack of them, and be simple enough to understand and admire them.

Simplicity will detach you from many worldly joys which are useless, even when not ridiculous or impious. It will show you the misery of those foolish people who place their happiness in riches, pleasure, flattery, success, beauty, flowers, and perfumes.

Unfortunate worldlings! you claim that joy is your share, and on hearing your shrill peals of laughter, one might believe you. But no; it is but a fictitious mirth, which ill-conceals the wounds, the anguish of a heart given over to evil and sin. Joy dwells only in the heart which is pure and the soul which is simple, and therein overflows and is diffused as balm on all the sorrows of this world.*

Those souls who are simple, the Gospel

* This truth has been emphasized in a very beautiful book, 'Vers la Joie,' by Lucie Félix-Faure Goyau.

assures us, are happy even in the midst of their tears, finding therein Divine consolation.

Simplicity will transform all the *duties of life for you.* Duties of a serious nature will appear even more pressing, more sacred, and in the light of simplicity you will accomplish them more eagerly; while it will raise up and magnify all lesser duties, showing you in the smallest and most humble the sign of God's majesty. What a help it will prove to you!

It is, above all, the material things of life which tire you—those little ordinary duties, the minor details of everyday life, renewed with a despairing monotony, which catch you as in a net, and as time goes on become so burdensome; there lies our greatest source of discouragement.

You feel that you were made for great things, you aspire to lofty flights, and here you are so low, in a poor little bark afloat upon a muddy pool to which there is no outlet, and therefore you despair.

But here within reach you have an easy means by which to free yourself, blossom forth, soar to the highest regions, and accomplish those great things for which you hunger and thirst; and this means is simplicity.

God is to be found in each tiny trifle, in each commonplace occupation, as He was beneath the swaddling clothes in the stable at Bethlehem.

He is there, but for want of simplicity you cannot see Him.

If you are simple, you will see God in this cloud of vulgar, material, everyday actions, as Our Lady and St. Joseph saw Him in the manger; and because you so see Him such actions will in your eyes become great and holy.

Yes, simplicity elevates the most material duties of life. The simple soul understands that 'the Word became flesh only that the flesh might in turn become the Word.' Simplicity has the marvellous power of making dust divine.

'Simplicity,' writes St. Francis of Sales, 'gives to all our actions their merit and their splendour, as the root gives to the flowers and leaves their life and beauty and to fruit its savour. Simplicity is like the ashes which fall from a fire and which preserve it.'

Finally, be simple in all your works, whether *apostolic*, *charitable*, or *devotional*. To be simple is to do all for God.

Some occupy themselves with charitable work purely from motives of *ostentation*. They seek to be conspicuous, to take the lead, to exercise a power which flatters their love of authority.

Others seek but a *pastime*, a useful diversion for their loneliness, a consolation for their sorrows.

Others see only the *philanthropic* and social side of all good works.

All such are very far from that simplicity which the Gospel preaches. They do not soar like the dove, but crawl about like barn-yard fowls; they confine themselves to earthly thoughts.

Again, others sincerely wish their neighbour well. They earnestly desire for him all that is for the good of his body and soul, for his welfare and salvation; they truly forget themselves. But in their ardour to serve others, *they lose sight of God*, or at best they consider *souls more than they do God*. They love souls more for themselves than for Him, and instead of God being first in their intentions, and the love of souls coming after, it is God who takes the second place. They only see God across the vision of souls instead of seeing souls in God and through Him.

Here is already a certain simplicity, but not enough; the intention is lacking in purity.

Finally, there are persons who truly seek God, but still, *not as they should*. Instead of serving God according to His plan, they serve Him according to their own. They wish to impose their views upon Him, their line of action, *themselves* in effect; therefore their simplicity is imperfect.

In all good works true simplicity consists in *acting for God* with absolute purity of intention, seeking before all and above all to *please Him.*

However interesting your neighbour may be in himself, he is interesting above all for God's sake. It is well to devote yourself to others for love of them, but it is a thousand times better to do so for the love of God, with the thought ever before you that while you work for them you glorify God.

If you are simple, God will be first in your thoughts and your will as well as in your heart. All will proceed from God, all will be done by Him and for Him, all will revert to Him.

The glory of God, the service and love of God, this is the aim of the simple soul. She must not let souls absorb her by even their most lofty and pressing needs, but must untiringly rectify her intentions, and direct them toward God, seeing *God always in souls* and *souls in God.*

Neither must she forget that the one way to glorify God, to serve Him and prove her love for Him, is to do His will; that is, to give herself in the measure that God asks, never trying to do more, and always acting according to *God's plan,* and not her own.

Therefore, you to whom God has given a sublime mission, either apostolic or charitable,

if you are beset by profane, egotistical, and evil thoughts, drive them from you and put in their place intentions which are wholly pure, thoughts which are wholly Divine.

If the demon whispers to you that you are looked up to because of your good works, that you are more deserving than others, if he incites you to be domineering or self-complacent, if he hides from your eyes the glory of God, showing you but human, earthly aims, close your eyes and close your ears to these perfidious suggestions, rectify your will and say: O Lord, I desire no other *aim* in life than to do Thy work, no other *guide* than Thy will, no other *happiness* than to procure Thy glory by labouring for the salvation of souls.

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER XI

THE PRACTICE OF SIMPLICITY

BE simple, therefore, in making God your *aim*, tending toward Him as your last end, making Him the object of all your activities.

Be simple in leaning upon God as a *means*.

Be simple that you may be *humble*, that you may learn to acknowledge that of yourself you can do nothing, and that left to your own resources it is impossible for you to do any good thing, as our Lord declares: 'Without Me ye can do nothing.'*

Be simple also that you may be *confident*, convinced that leaning upon God, counting upon His grace, you will not be deceived, and that 'you can do all things in Him that strengtheneth you.'†

Be simple, that you may know your own nothingness, your wretchedness, and your sin, and profoundly despise yourself.

* St. John xv. 5. † Phil. iv. 13.

Be simple, that you may contemplate the heart of God, its love, its infinite goodness, and that you may rest in His grace with most perfect confidence.

Be simple in the *smallest* things, as well as in great ones, and even more so, for they more often present themselves, and are most pleasing to God.

'Thou hast wounded My heart,' cries the Spouse in the Song of Songs. 'Thou hast ravished My heart with one of thy eyes, and with one of thy hairs.'*

What is there more wonderful, more essential, or more important, than an eye? and what more worthless than a hair? Be prepared to suffer, to bear heavy crosses, stimulate your love to the point of martyrdom, offer Our Lord all that is dearest to you, even your eyes and your life if need be; these 'great things' will touch His heart. But do not neglect the lesser ones; offer Him all that is most ordinary in your life, your very food and rest, according to the word of the Apostle. His heart will also be touched by these little things.

St. Catherine of Siena, wrapped in the most sublime meditation, lost in ecstacy, counselling the great of the earth by the light of her wisdom

* Cant. iv., 9.

and contemplation, enraptured the heart of her Celestial Spouse; but she pleased Him no less when, at her father's bidding, she devoted herself to the humblest of household duties, and tranquilly continued her meditation in the midst of these lowly tasks. Seeing in her father the person of Our Lord, in her mother the Blessed Virgin, in her brothers the Apostles, and joyfully submitting to whatever was asked of her.

It is right and good that you should devote yourselves to great things, to important and excellent works; but practise for the love of God those little humble virtues which spring up like flowers at the foot of the Cross: the bearing of some slight misfortune, some passing infirmity, a vexation, a disappointment, an offence, a humiliation, certain tiresome occupations at home or abroad. As such occasions are ever recurring, what a treasure of spiritual riches you can amass if you know how to profit by them!

Is it not clear that simplicity is what you most lack? Ah! if you were truly simple, simple in all things and at every turn, with God, with others, with yourselves; if you were, indeed, perfectly simple, what more would be wanting?

You are sensitive, affectionate; you admit it; you constantly prove it; you claim even to be excessively so, since you suffer thereby.

You have energy and will-power; you display it; you daily expend it unsparingly. The amount which you sometimes employ to gratify your passions is incalculable.

You are tender, tactful, intelligent; it is one of your triumphs.

You have noble, generous aspirations, admirable enthusiasms; you are made up of self-sacrifice and abnegation.

With such excellent qualities, and such efficacious virtues, why, then, are your lives too often commonplace, empty, and useless, at times even odious, culpable, and scandalous?

What is it that is wanting? I repeat, you are lacking in simplicity.

You do not know how to direct your strength and your qualities; you do not know how to make use of them. You let them all run to waste and perish because you are not simple.

Simplicity ennobles all things, directs all and makes use of all for the glory of God.

Consider the dove: she is marvellously equipped to rise on high, to soar, to attain with ease to the most lofty, distant regions. And for this there is but one thing needful, that she should spread her wings and then make use of them.

Let me once more repeat: you yourself are

the dove, and simplicity the all-powerful wings. Why not hasten to make use of them?

Oh! spread your wings, and speedily; with bold and rapid flight you will traverse incredible space and attain even to God Himself.

MEANS OF ACQUIRING SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER XII

MEANS OF ACQUIRING SIMPLICITY

AND now, after what we have said, who would not wish to become simple?

But how can this be achieved?

You must first *meditate* upon this virtue, in order to understand its primary importance, its absolute necessity, and to arouse within yourself the most ardent desire to possess it at any cost.

Without this ardent desire and resolute will, all your efforts will be in vain. Your endeavours, your inclinations, will woefully fail before your egoism, vanity, and selfishness, your passions and all the human motives which constantly influence you, and which overthrow the edifice of your simplicity as fast as you build it up.

But once possessed of the calm and resolute will to attain to simplicity, this is what you must do.

In the first place *order your life* in general, your occupations taken as a whole, and your manner of action, in such a way as to make sure that all

you may do will be in accordance with the Will of God.

A rule of life chosen in the spirit of obedience, and with the approval of a prudent director, sufficiently broad and yielding to fit the varying demands of your condition, and to lend itself to the innumerable unforseen circumstances which will constantly arise to change your plans, yet sufficiently firm and precise to exclude capriciousness, and the self-will ever so ready to escape from all order and duty—such a rule is the first condition and the indispensable means to lead you to purity of intention, and thence to simplicity.

Only thus can you be certain of seeking truly as the ultimate end of your actions and of your whole life God's good pleasure.

Next, every night before going to sleep *pass in review* the *occupations* of the *morrow*, consider what changes or additions must be made in your general plan, and prepare for all, having God's Will constantly before you as the absolute and unchanging rule of all that you do.

In the morning, on waking, *offer to God as a whole* all the thoughts, words, and acts of the day. Promise and protest that you wish to do all for His sake, for His glory, His service and His love, in union with the acts which Our Lord Jesus Christ and Our Most Blessed Lady accom-

plished on earth, and which the Holy Spirit ever perpetuates in this world by means of the righteous.

Already this first offering, if not retracted, will communicate to all your actions an intention which we call virtual, and which will suffice to render them supernatural. Your soul will be placed in an interior disposition of simplicity, and as long as this state continues, your acts will receive therefrom the seal of holiness, which will make them particularly pleasing to God.

Then from *time to time*, especially when beginning each action, and in the case of the longest and most important, remember to *renew your morning resolution*, if only by mentally saying, 'O God, I do this for Thy sake, for love of Thee this meditation, this task, this repast, this visit, this good work, this suffering, this trial.'

It is told of a pious hermit that he never began an action without pausing to direct his glance towards heaven, and when asked the reason for this, he replied: 'The better to make sure of my aim.'

As the sportsman takes aim for a moment before shooting, the more surely to reach his mark, so the hermit aimed at God that he might be more certain to reach Him. Follow his example; aim always at God before acting by means of an upright intention.

If, after this, during the act in question, a human intention steals in to tempt you, an intention less worthy, or even *quite* worthless, let it neither disturb nor arrest you; but simply reply, as did the venerable Jean d'Avila to vanity: 'You come too late; I've given all to God,' and continue to act.

If the thought that the world will see your good works distresses and frightens you, do not stop for that either. Recall to mind the words of the Gospel: 'So let your light shine before men, that they may see your works, and glorify your Father Who is in heaven.'*

The good which you do in the sight of the world may cause others to follow your example, and thus God will be glorified. Rejoice in this thought, and forget the praise and advantages which may fall to your share. And so your intention will remain pure.

During your actions, above all those of a certain duration, renew your intention by raising up your heart toward God, repeating: 'For Thy sake, my God.' Pause sometimes an instant in the midst of a task, if it be possible without detriment to what you are doing, and say to yourself, 'What is my object in this?' and therewith promptly reply: 'Thou, my God, Thou alone!'

If you are *disturbed* in the midst of a medi-

* St. Matt. v. 16.

tation or a prayer; if, for reasons of health, you are kept from Mass or your customary communions, recall to mind that you must be ready 'to leave God for God,' and that in thus giving up without irritation a pious devotion dear to your heart, you unite yourself still more closely to Him, you progress in simplicity, and accordingly in perfection.

Beware of *eagerness*, of precipitation, agitation, irritability, of a too natural activity, sometimes feverish, which God does not bless.

Be calm, peaceful, quiet, if not in the imagination and senses, and those inferior faculties of the soul which the will cannot always master, at least be so in that higher self, in those superior powers of the soul, in those lofty regions where God looks to judge you, and which alone are wholly governed by your free-will. 'Make haste slowly.' You will find God more surely.

Make use of *ejaculatory prayers* as often as possible. Do not hesitate in so doing to employ certain means which might appear childish, did not the end in view lend them an infinite dignity. Promise yourself, for instance, that when you hear the clock strike, when you pass from one room to another, when you sit down at table or at your desk, when you seal a letter or take up your things to go out, on entering a house or on leaving it, and in hundreds of other circumstances

which you will determine, to raise your heart for an instant to God.

No means are petty when used for great ends. In proportion as you make it a habit to have recourse to God, your heart will expand and your love will increase; soon you will no longer have need of such methods and means. Your soul will so hunger and thirst after God, that of yourself you will unceasingly turn to Him.

The needle of a compass points north; if you turn it aside, it weighs against your finger, showing its natural tendency, and from the moment all pressure ceases returns to its original direction.

And so the soul which has become truly simple turns continually to God, impelled by an instinctive need. If apparently turned aside by the duties of life, of herself she ever tends to return to Him, and as soon as she can she does so completely.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

CHAPTER XIII

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

AT LAST means of acquiring simplicity, and the best, is the practice of the presence of God; it is of such importance that I must lay great stress upon it.

As simplicity is the foundation of perfection, so the sense of the presence of God is the foundation of simplicity.

Simplicity, in fact, consists in acting for God; it is therefore plain that before all you must think of God, and this you will never do better than if you are always conscious of His presence.

Let us further explain this influence of the sense of the presence of God upon simplicity.

The sense of the presence of God will make you simple for two reasons: (1) Because in the presence of God all evil intentions become impossible; (2) because His presence will efficaciously stimulate the purest of intentions.

In the first place, the sense of the presence of God will put to flight all evil intentions, will

destroy the 'lust of the eye,' and will preserve you from sin.

It is because the sinner forgets that he is seen by God, says the Psalmist, that he sins so continually.* And after having enumerated at length the crimes of Jerusalem, the Prophet Ezekiel finally reproaches her with forgetfulness of God as the cause of all her disorders.

How often we find proof of this in the confessional. When after long and painful avowals we say to a penitent: 'In the midst of your sins had you no thought of God?' the reply often is: 'No, Father, I had forgotten Him;' or, 'The thought of Him was too painful, so I put it from me;' or sometimes again: 'It was the thought of Him which brought me back.'

A sinner flees from the presence of God to escape the remorse of conscience. When Adam sinned he hid himself, no longer able to bear the sight of his Creator. And when called he paid no heed; twice even had God to call him and summon him to appear before Him.

And so it is with children: they hide while doing wrong, and when it is done they try to escape all notice. The mere sight of you stops them, troubles them; they are afraid.

If the thought of its parents, the sight of them, and the fear of their punishments, serve to arrest

* Ps. ix.-x. 5.

a child, how much more will the thought and the fear of God exercise upon us an all-powerful influence?

'All sins,' says St. Theresa, 'are committed because we do not think of God as really present, but imagine Him as very far away.'

If we said to ourselves: God is here, God sees me, God judges me, in one single instant God could bring my life to an end, and cast me into eternal darkness—then fear would triumph over pleasure, satisfaction, and temptation, and even if taken unawares our weakness should cause our downfall, we could not remain in a state of sin.

If we said to ourselves: God is here, and I am outraging Him; God loads me with favours, and I am overwhelming Him with contempt; God died for me, and I am crucifying Him once more—then truly love would fill our hearts—an all-powerful, infinite love wherein to find strength to rise triumphant over all difficulties.

The thought of God produces the miracle of sudden transformations in souls; it has been responsible for the conversion of great sinners. One amongst them, a sinful woman, thought to tempt St. Ephrem, who replied to her: 'Go out upon the streets.' 'What,' rejoined the miserable creature, 'would you have me do wrong before all men?' 'And would you,' cried the

saint, 'do wrong in the sight of God?' His words were the flash of light which penetrated her hardened heart and wrung from her floods of repentant tears.

'If,' says St. Thomas, 'we always remembered that God is present and that He sees all, we would never or almost never commit a sin.' And St. Jerome expresses the same idea, saying: 'The thought of God closes the door upon all sin.'

St. Ambrose relates that during a solemn sacrifice offered to the gods by Alexander the Great, a young page carried a lighted torch by the side of his sovereign. In the course of the ceremony the flame reached the child's hand, and he, who could only have saved himself by letting the torch fall, bore without flinching the frightful pain, fearing his master's displeasure. 'Respect for the royal majesty,' cried St. Ambrose, 'could even in a feeble child so triumph over nature.' How much more surely should respect for the Divine Majesty impel a Christian soul to overcome all temptations and to endure all ills rather than offend God to His face.

'Lord,' cried Job, 'lay down now, put me in a surety with Thee; who is he that will strike hands with me?'* Beneath Thy regard and in Thy presence I have no fear.

* Job xvii. 3.

'If we were careful to keep ourselves in God's presence,' says St. John Chrysostom, 'we would never think, say, nor do any wrong thing, for we would say to ourselves unceasingly: God sees all, God beholds all my actions.'

The practice of the presence of God is thus a sovereign remedy against sin, because it makes all guilty intentions impossible.

Beneath the eye of God the heart is purified; all unworthy sentiments become unbearable; all that is contrary to simplicity is destroyed, and, as one might say, 'consumed by the Divine fire.'

But the sense of the presence of God does more than purify our heart and rectify our intentions, which is only the negative side of simplicity; it fills us with an ardent longing for the greatest good, and carries simplicity in no time to its highest point of perfection.

How often during some interminable evening party, in the overheated, exhausted atmosphere of a salon, beneath the dazzling glare of lights, some guest feels faint or ill. She continues to laugh and talk gaily, her indisposition passing quite unnoticed; and if she be a foolish, giddy person, she would perish rather than appear less charming, less to be admired. She exercises all her self-control that nothing of her suffering may be seen.

At home in the midst of her family she complains of the least inconvenience or the slightest fatigue. Habitually indolent, pleasure-loving, poor-spirited, in the sight of the world she becomes vigorous, courageous, and admirably energetic.

Should not the influence of the presence of God upon a Christian soul be far greater, far more effective in leading her to good, far more powerful to sustain her in every sacrifice and effort, and to make her wholly simple?

Soldiers become as it were electrified beneath the eye of their leader, be he an Alexander, a Charlemagne, or a Napoleon, and so inspired fly joyfully to meet danger and shed their blood for their country.

Shall the eye of the Sovereign Master of heaven and earth, the eye of God Himself, have less power over our hearts?

In the spring-time, under the fresh warm light of the sun, the earth renews her youth. All nature was dead; but beneath the kindly touch of his sweet rays life flows afresh, and the whole world of nature, trees, leaves, and flowers, blossoms forth anew.

Is not God the sun of the world, the sun of souls? Beneath His Divine glance and in His Divine presence the most callous and indifferent souls will receive new life; the Christian life will

flow anew, lofty desires will blossom, and all the virtues bloom.

The presence of God is all-powerful in impelling us toward good, all-powerful to increase our love and lead us onward toward perfection. This is what God taught Abram when he said: 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect.'*

Perfection is love. But how can the love of God take shape without the thought of God? And on the other hand with the thought of Him, how can this love fail to increase?

Even human friendships are strengthened by frequent intercourse, and yet, but for rare and noble exceptions, it is the faults and failings rather than the good qualities which we mutually discover as friendship develops.

But with God, the more you know Him, the more you will think of Him, and the more you will reflect on the remembrance of His graces and His love, His greatness and His favours; the more also you will be drawn toward Him by a gentle, irresistible power.

Between Him and you, between God and your soul, by the habit of placing yourself before Him and of living in His presence, there will be formed a tender and intimate union which each day will strengthen.

Prayers, meditations, reading, pious exercises,

* Gen. xvii. 1.

will not suffice for this growth of love. 'While on the fire, water boils,' says St. John Chrysostom; 'but when removed, it soon grows cold.' To keep love from growing cold you must think of the presence of God; often renew in your heart acts of fervour, and unceasingly keep your soul turned toward heaven as the sunflower turns its face toward the sun.

'When you love,' says St. Theresa, 'you unceasingly think of the beloved one, and so your love grows greater.'

The thought of God will increase your love and make you rapidly advance in the path of perfection, for it will soon lead you to simplicity.

THE PRESENCE OF GOD

(*Continued*)

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRESENCE OF GOD (*continued*)

AS we have said, the habitual sense of the presence of God is thus the essential foundation of simplicity. But how can we form this precious habit? By *removing the obstacles* and by *taking certain measures*.

The *obstacles* are dissipation of mind and attachment to trifles, futilities, things of no importance; lack of reflection, the habit of letting thoughts and imagination wander without guidance or control; foolish reading, frivolous company, and endless conversations which are perfectly useless.

The obstacles are furthermore to be found in an unruly heart, in the outward distractions on which it is set, in certain unfortunate, even dangerous, friendships; in engrossing affections, violent passions, eager desires, and too hastily formed resolutions.

And, finally, in the examples of the world with its unprofitable amusements, and the frittering away of life, leaving you no longer mistress

of yourself, in an undisciplined life, made up of whims and freaks and fancies.

You must get rid of all this, and control your thoughts and affections, and direct your whole life; for this is the required condition preparatory to all serious thought of God.

Next, take positive *measures*, make use of your *intelligence*, your *affections*, your *will*; the former to consider the fact of God's presence, the latter to unite yourself to Him by acts of love and desire.

The exercise of the *intelligence* is the easier of the two. God is everywhere present; faith teaches us this: 'All the earth is filled with His glory.' 'God is mindful,' says St. Augustine, 'of each one of your thoughts, words, and actions, as though you were the only creature in the world, and you alone wholly occupied the Divine consciousness.' And he further represents the creature with regard to God as a sponge immersed in the ocean. God is immense, and the creature is, in a way, lost in Him.

God sees all things at one moment of time; all is observed and remembered by Him. In the Day of Judgment He will recall all things to us: 'Then shall you behold a book,' the Church tells us, 'wherein all these things are written.'*

* 'Dies Iræ,' strophe 5.

Not only is God present to all creatures, but He *acts* in all; they have strength and life, are capable of action and expression, only because of Him. 'He is in the sun,' says St. Liguori, 'to give us light, in fire to give us heat, in water to refresh us, in bread to nourish us, in clothing to cover us, and in all things for our service.'

This wondrous thought has caused the very saints to tremble with emotion.

When St. Francis of Assisi contemplated Nature, he was lost in ecstasy. He would pause to call to the birds, to bid them sing the praises of God.

'O God!' exclaimed St. Augustine, in a transport of love, 'Heaven and earth and all creation call upon me to love You;' and casting his eyes upon the sea, the mountains, and the plains, raising them even to the starry skies, he felt that all things found voice to cry, 'Augustine, love God, for He created thee only to be loved by thee.'

St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi, filled with love and admiration at the sight of a beautiful flower, sighed in rapture: 'From all eternity God thought of creating this flower for me.'

Others, like St. Theresa, when considering the marvellous works of God, have heard, as it were, a universal chorus, reproaching them with their ingratitude towards their Creator.

St. Simeon Salus would strike with his staff the flowers of the fields and the grass of the meadows, saying, 'Hush, hush! I hear you. God has made you so beautiful for love of me, that I might learn to love Him; but, alas! I love Him not. Oh! hush, then, and cease to reproach me with my ingratitude! I can no longer bear your reproof.'

Follow, then, the example of the Saints. Behold God in nature, God present everywhere; but, above all, behold God in His masterpiece, in reasoning creatures, behold Him in yourselves.

'Know you not,' said St. Paul, 'that *you* are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?'* and he often reverted to this thought, such was the importance he attached to it.

And this was because he understood the teaching of the Divine Master: 'If anyone love Me . . . and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and will make Our abode with him.'†

God dwells in the soul of the righteous; He makes therein His permanent abode, His royal residence. To find God you have only to retire within yourself in perfect recollection.

When St. Catherine of Siena was prevented by her parents from going to church, she withdrew, she tells us, into the little sanctuary she

* 1 Cor. iii. 16. † St. John xiv. 23.

had made within herself, and there, amidst her overburdening duties, she continued in *perfect recollection* her loving converse with God.

A last exercise is to apply your intelligence, not only to God, but to Jesus Christ, in thinking of the Saviour and in calling to mind the various phases of His existence—at Bethlehem, in the desert, at Nazareth, during his public life, His Passion, on Calvary, in the tomb, or risen and ascended in Heaven at the right hand of His Father.

But this exercise of your intelligence does not suffice; your *will* and *affections* must be brought into play by the acts you will make.

Think of God as present and active, God Who sees, hears, and judges you, and make acts of faith, adoration, submission, of supplication, of love, and of total self-sacrifice. And, above all, in thinking of Jesus Christ make frequent acts of love, acts coming from the very depths of your heart, by which, in a way, you place your heart wholly in His.

May Jesus Christ become your Friend in the full meaning of the word—the true and faithful Friend of whom Holy Scripture speaks, saying: 'He is a protection and a strong defence, a very refuge in life and in eternity.'* And of Whom the 'Imitation' further says: 'Without this Friend

* Eccles. vi. 14-16.

thou canst not well live,' for 'he that cleaveth unto creatures shall fall with that which is subject to fall, but he that embraceth Jesus shall stand for ever.' *

May Jesus be your Friend in all afflictions of heart, soul, and mind; in trials, in sadness, or neglect.

At times your heart aches from its very fulness, and you must confide in someone to find relief from this oppression; and yet when you seek this necessary consolation in a creature, how often you find but an illusion, how rarely the reality!

But who, on the other hand, ever turned to Jesus without receiving the most marvellous help? Since Mary Magdalen bared her heart to Him, as with her tears she bathed His feet, what broken heart weeping near the Saviour has ever failed to find unhoped-for strength together with all loving consolation? 'At the thought of God,' cried David, 'my heart was filled with joy and consolation.'

And what more could a Christian ask when she can say: Jesus suffered and died for me; He has already borne my sorrows and sufferings, and borne them to merit grace and strength for me? When He hung upon the Cross He thought of me, He saw me, and even now from the height

* 'Imitation,' ii. 8.

of Heaven He is looking down upon me, thinking of me and praying for me.

Jesus is the Divine Friend Who consoles and strengthens, the Friend who revives us in our moments of weakness, and sustains us in the hour of temptation. If you are tempted, remember He was tried before you. If you are governed by pride, self-love, or vanity, think of Jesus during His Passion, covered with blows, spat upon, humiliated, and crowned with thorns.

If you are beset by laziness and sensuality, think of Jesus covered with a bloody sweat, scourged, carrying His Cross; think of Him hanging thereupon, His hands and feet pierced, His Sacred Body torn, devoured by thirst and shattered by pain.

If you are a slave to material things, think of Jesus poor and wholly destitute at Bethlehem, at Nazareth, and during His public life; think of Him upon the Cross rendering up His soul in the supreme embrace of poverty.

If you fall into sin, remember that Jesus fell even three times on the road to Calvary that He might so merit for you the grace to rise again after your falls as He rose after His, and so that discouragement might never enter your heart.

And if at times the trials and the burden of life are too heavy, if nature rebels and in spite

of yourself you cry out, I can bear no more, remember that Jesus in His human nature knew this extremity, the very brink of despair, and that He, too, cried out: 'My Father . . . let this chalice pass from Me! . . . My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?'*

Jesus is furthermore the Friend Who counsels, inspires, and directs us. In all matters of initiative, in necessary decisions, in the forming of plans, the accepting of responsibilities, in the advice you will give, and in the influence you will have over those entrusted to you, He will help, enlighten, and lead you; He will prompt the word to be spoken, the counsel to be given, the measure to be taken. He will relieve all anxiety and anguish; He will give you peace and tranquillity concerning the decisions you have made.

Jesus is the Friend Who will help you in prayer, Who will fix your attention, keep your thoughts from wandering, and attach your mind and heart to His Father, for no one goes to His Father save by Him. He is the Way, the Door which leads to His Father's house. Without Him your prayers will be only vain words, powerless to rise above earth; with Him they become living holy voices which will rise as high as Heaven and reach the ear of God.

* St. Matt. xxvi. 39 and xxvii. 46.

May Jesus be for you the Friend of each hour. Think, speak, act, and rest in union with Him, and I make bold to say with St. Paul, eat and drink with Him, and like Him for the glory of His Father. When you awake call upon Jesus, call upon Him at the beginning and end of each action; pause from time to time to cast a glance toward Him, as a mother interrupts her work, her very breathing, to glance toward the child who plays or works by her side.

Call upon Jesus when leaving home and upon your return; call upon Him a last time before falling asleep. Make Him the beginning, the centre, the end of all things; may His name always be for you first and last, your alpha and omega. May Jesus have the first place, the place of honour, the royal place, in your heart.

In the world we see silly, frivolous women, vain, material creatures, who think only of the world's opinion. This thought absorbs and guides them; they are possessed, hypnotized by it. On rising, while dressing, when at table, at home or abroad, in their thoughts, words, or actions, always and everywhere, they ask themselves: 'What will the world say?' For them the *world* is a real and perpetual presence—an ever watchful eye, by which they are governed, conquered, and enslaved.

May Jesus be to you what the world is to them, and may your whole life be inspired by the desire to please Him.

To-day the world expels Him from its midst. Men cry as did the Jews before them: We will not have Him to reign over us; take Him away and crucify Him! 'The nations have trembled,' says the Psalmist; 'all the powers of the earth have gathered together against the Lord and against His Christ.' It is a conspiracy which savours of madness; they would abolish the very Name of God.

It is for you to make amends by quietly protesting and resisting as a Christian may. It is for you to give your hearts to Jesus all the more generously as the world gives Him less, and to receive Him with all the more love in proportion as others drive Him away with a more intense hatred.

Live beneath the eye of God, united to Jesus in thought and will, in heart and soul; make Him known, manifest Him to those about you; be, as it were, a living mirror wherein His reflection may be seen, and let Him shine forth through your Christian influence upon all who approach you. In short, by means of simplicity and purity of intention endeavour each day to grow in the true and pure love of Jesus for Himself.

The more simple you are, the more closely

will you be united to Jesus; and as you are more closely united to Him, so will you become more simple. Thus is formed a double current which will bear you to the highest point of perfection. By means of simplicity, like the Apostles on Mount Thabor, you will 'see no one, but Jesus only.'* The more clearly you see Him, the more you will love Him; and in proportion as you become united to Him, just so fully will you become the living manifestation of His supreme prayer: 'That they all may be one, as Thou, Father, in Me, and I in Thee: that they also may be one in Us. . . .'†

God will help you in this great work, this marvellous work of holiness, a work which is His even more than yours.

God loves your souls more than the most loving mother ever loved her children, more than the most tender and devoted wife ever loved her husband. God loves your souls with an incomprehensible love, because He is infinite. And because He so loves them, he unceasingly urges to the conquest of that most precious of virtues—namely, simplicity.

It is because God loves your souls that He would fashion them Himself.

And if He wills to ennoble and beautify them, if He desires to bless them and overwhelm them

* St. Matt. xvii. 8. † St. John xvii. 21.

with favours, then He will send you vexatious disappointments and failures, opposition and mortifications, that you may not attach yourself to creatures, but solely to Him.

He will cause you to fail where you hoped to succeed, and will use means unthought of by you to insure final success.

He will contrive to show you your own nothingness, to prove to you that in the work of your sanctification all that is lasting will be done by Him alone.

On the ruins of self He will raise up the edifice of your perfection. He may even divest you of all things, and perhaps at moments will let you believe that He Himself has abandoned you in order to make you more like unto Jesus uttering His cry of distress and desolation.

But it is just then that He will be nearest to you, will most effectively sustain you, and be most truly present within you.

He will use these trials as marvellous remedies to free you from your imperfections, and to open your eyes more and more fully to the uncreated beauty and splendour of the supernatural world.

Thenceforward you will become more like the elect in Heaven; by means of simplicity God will become all in all to you as He is to them, while awaiting the day when, freed from the

encumbrance of the flesh, you will rise to contemplate Him face to face, and to know Him for ever as you are known to Him.

Then your simplicity will be perfect, because there can never be anything further to separate you from God, and you will live for ever enraptured in the sight of the Divine beauty and in the unutterable enjoyment and perfect possession of the '*one thing necessary*.'*

Here below all are not called to the same degree of simplicity, but you should desire this most admirable virtue. Seek it out, and practice it in the measure that God wills and in proportion to the grace which He gives you; for simplicity is your greatest treasure in this world, as it will be your highest reward in the next. In the measure that you have been simple on earth you will be glorified in Heaven.

* St. Luke x. 42.

JESUS AND SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER XV

JESUS AND SIMPLICITY

SIMPLICITY is the sign and seal of the Gospel, because it is the distinctive feature, the very nature of the Saviour.*

From the first moment of His life until His last breath upon the Cross Jesus never failed to look toward His Father and to act for God. The Gospel bears testimony to this, as well as all the words and acts of Jesus Himself.

'When Christ cometh into the world,' says St. Paul, He saith, 'Behold I come . . . to do Thy will, O God. . . . I will give my laws in their hearts.'† His first thought was for God. The first use He made of His liberty was to submit to the will of God, and to give Himself up wholly to Him.

And in what was to follow Jesus never swerved

* The passage is well known wherein Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in a moment of sincerity, exalted the 'simplicity of the Gospel.'

† Heb. x. 5-7.

one instant from this attitude. When at the age of twelve, after having left Mary and Joseph in the temple, He found them again in great distress, and wondering at His conduct, His only reply was: 'Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?'*

During the thirty years spent at Nazareth, what did He do? He remained in the presence of God, working in obedience and humility, that He might please God and live wholly for Him.

If at the age of thirty He leaves His Mother and retires into the desert, it is because He is led thither by the Holy Spirit.†

If the devil tempts Him, it is always in God's name that He repels him: 'Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God. Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. . . . Him only shalt thou serve.'‡

On the banks of the Jordan the Spirit of God descends visibly upon Jesus in the form of a dove.

When for the first time He enters the Synagogue, He opens the Gospels at this passage: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore He hath anointed Me.'§

* St. Luke ii. 49.
† St. Matt. iv. 1.
‡ St. Matt. iv. 4.
§ St. Luke iv. 18.

His first reply to the Samaritan who questions Him concerning the true worship is: '. . . the true adorers shall adore the Father in spirit and and in truth.'* And immediately after He says to His Apostles: 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me.†

To all the questions put to Him, to all the traps laid for Him, to all the outrages proffered Him, He always replies by speaking of His Father, of the offences and insults offered to God, and of the love, confidence, and submission which all owe to Him. He sums up all religion, law, and morality in this unique precept: 'And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.'‡

Has the world ever seen teaching, philosophy, or doctrine more simple than Our Lord's sermon in which He forbids two masters,§ and reduces all to the love of God?

And does not His love of simplicity account for His invectives and menaces against the Pharisees? Was it not their hypocrisy, cheating, lying, and duplicity which He condemned with each oft-repeated 'Woe to you!'‖

'You make clean the edge of the cup, but within you leave it full of bitterness. . . . You

* St. John iv. 23. † St. John iv. 34.
‡ St. Mark xii. 3. § St. Matt. vi. 37.
‖ St. Matt. xxiii. 2-14 *et passim*.

have sat down in the seat of Moses, but of his works you fulfil nothing. On the widow and orphan you put burdens which you yourselves could not bear. You loose your ox and your ass on the Sabbath Day, and lead them to the drinking place—yet you will not that I heal this woman of her infirmity.'* You are like whited sepulchres, which within are full of filthiness and corruption.'†

Each time that Jesus condemns the Pharisees it is because of their hypocrisy and their lack of simplicity. They desired to please men and not God: whence His outbursts of anger against them.

He loved little children because of their simplicity, this simplicity which He holds up to us as a model, and as the condition of our reaching Heaven.

His simplicity is transmitted to the hearts of His Apostles. They are spellbound and irresistably attracted by it.

'Master, where dwellest thou?' they asked of Him, and He replied: 'Come and see . . . .'‡ And they came at once and remained with Him.

'Follow Me,' He said to them once again, and without hesitation they left all—their employ-

* St. Luke xiv. 5, xi. 43.
† St. Matt. xxiii. 4, 6, 13, 25.
‡ St. John i. 38, 39.

ment, their nets, their work, their kindred, all in effect to follow Him.*

He required an absolute simplicity of language as well: 'Yea, yea; no, no; and that which is over and above this is evil.'†

In Himself He carried simplicity to its highest degree; He spoke as He thought, and He thought as His Father: 'As I hear, so I judge.' He listens within Himself to the word of God, to the judgment of God, and He pronounces the self-same word, He delivers the same judgment.

Between Him and His Father there exists an absolute and unchanging conformity of thought, will, and feeling—that perfect unity of heart and of love which constitutes the ideal of simplicity.

In Jesus the human spirit is so wholly submissive and docile to the inspiration of the spirit of God that there is in truth but one spirit, according to the word of the Apostle: 'He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit.'

The simplicity of Jesus shows with an even greater beauty during His Passion.

He is simple indeed at Gethsemani. His hour has come, His Father has spoken, and that

* 'And he arose up, and followed Him' (St. Matt. ix. 9); 'And they forthwith left their nets and father and followed Him' (St. Matt. iv. 22); 'Behold, we have left all things, and have followed Thee' (St. Matt. xix. 27).

† St. Matt. vi. 37.

suffices. He seeks neither to hide, to defend Himself, nor to escape. He goes straight to meet suffering and death. His human nature is afraid, shrinks, trembles, and begs for mercy. He rises above it, He does not for one instant draw back: 'For this am I come!'

He might well have asked His Father to send angels to deliver Him. He never considered it. He cared only to obey and to execute the decrees of Providence.

Before the Council He is simple in word and manner. He is meek and dignified, unassuming and resolute. He has not that stoic severity of look and bearing which certain painters lend to Him.

His dignity is gentle, His firmness indicates goodness. What is human fades from Him, what is Divine alone appears. He forgets Himself to see only God. He knows that naught can happen but by the Will of His Father; that His judges and torturers have no power against Him save that which God permits.*

And this is why, above all, He keeps silent, never seeking to defend Himself, referring all to His Father alone.

He is simple upon Calvary. No bitterness, no reproach for those who crucify Him nor for

* 'Thou shouldst not have any power against Me, unless it were given thee from above,' He says to Pilate (St. John xix. 11).

the throng who outrage Him. No thought of Himself, not a single complaint. He is conscious only of God and the souls of sinners.

He thirsts for these souls, He pardons them, He promises them an eternity in Paradise, He bequeaths to them His Mother.

With regard to His Father, in the very moment of the most cruel neglect, the most dire distress, He speaks only of submission and confidence. O my Saviour, how adorable is Thy simplicity!

What unity reigns in Thy thoughts, affections, and deeds, in Thy sufferings, Thy virtues and prayers! All is for God and our souls, and it is always for God that Thou savest our souls: that His name may be hallowed by them, His Kingdom come, and His Will be done through them. Souls are the harvest, and the harvest is for the Master.

So 'that one thing alone is necessary': to glorify God in Himself, to glorify Him in souls and by souls, to look at God always, to work for God always, to refer all that you do to Him, to see only the Creator in the creature, and the creature only in God—that is the whole aim of Thy life, O Jesus, and there is also perfect simplicity.

Ah! how lofty and beautiful is simplicity in itself, but how much more beautiful and how much more attractive, how holy, adorable, and

Divine in the heart and soul of Jesus! For simplicity is in truth the spirit of Jesus, the spirit of God in the creature.

May simplicity be our habitual exercise, our unceasing inspiration, our very life and soul. In its practice may we learn to die to all created things and live only to the Creator.

May all that is human in us vanish, and that alone remain which is Divine; or at least, since to be human is our condition, may our humanity become Divine as in Jesus, and seeking God in all things by means of simplicity, may we find Him in all things, cleave to Him, and rest in Him for ever.

MARY AND SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER XVI

MARY AND SIMPLICITY

IF in Jesus we see the radiant light of simplicity, in Mary we find the mirror without blemish in which simplicity is reflected.

Alike in all things, saving only the Divinity of Jesus, the Mother and Son resemble each other above all in this essential quality, for who could look into Mary's most pure heart without finding, in all its shining beauty, the simplicity of Jesus?

Mary is simple from her first reasoning moment. She goes straight to the temple, direct to God. She gives herself generously and for ever; she never looks back, she holds God fast, and will never leave Him.

In Mary there is no self-seeking, no care for self, for the creature, no regard for public opinion and the judgments of men. She sees God alone in all things.

In the temple her life is but a sigh of love towards her Creator, a longing for God. God is

unknown, unhonoured, unloved. Thousands of creatures forget their Creator, their Father; they outrage and insult Him at each moment of the day and night. Sin, hideous and daring, rears its head on every side, and ever increasing in the most appalling manner, casts its shadow over the glory of God.

This is Mary's sorrow, her perpetual anguish. She prays for the Messiah, she yearns for Him with all the strength of her desires, the fervour of her heart, and all the burning ardour of her loving soul. 'O God!' she cries, 'send Him whom Thou shalt send, glorify Thyself in the Messiah, haste Thou, my God, hasten the hour of Thy triumph!' such is the simplicity of Mary's prayer.

And it penetrates the heavens, this prayer, over and above the sinful tumult of the world; it rises even to the feet of the Eternal, and there is heard. Thanks to her, the hour of deliverance is at hand.

The Angel Gabriel, bearer of the sublime message, is sent by God to a humble virgin of Nazareth.

In her simplicity, the sight of an angel does not frighten Mary; but she is amazed and troubled by his words.

As simplicity impelled her to desire the coming of the Messiah, so it banished from her mind

the thought that she might be His Mother. In contrast to all the women of Israel who aspired to motherhood, in the hope of giving birth to the Messiah, Mary had, by vow, formally renounced this lofty ambition. Her simplicity blinded her to her own virtues and perfections, and therefore she is troubled, and does not understand.

But when the Angel makes known to her the purpose and the will of God, this same simplicity prevents her asking further explanations, or declining on plea of her unworthiness; and, without a moment's hesitation, she shuts her eyes to all considerations save that of submission to God's good pleasure. 'Behold,' she says, 'the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me, according to thy word.'

Where could you find a simplicity more ready and generous, or more pure, and more like unto the simplicity of Jesus?

It is the characteristic of simplicity to be indifferent to honours, even forgetful of them; but it is a still higher degree of simplicity to accept, without thought of self, honours and responsibilities when God gives them to us. Then in all truth is the soul guiltless of self-love, totally detached from self, and wholly lost in God, Whom she seeks uniquely for Himself alone.

Joseph, however, is in ignorance of the Divine decree; he as yet knows nothing of what has

passed between the Angel and Mary, and, amazed and scandalized by what he sees, he 'is minded to put her away privately.'*

What a test of Mary's simplicity! Shall she leave Joseph a prey to suspicion, as unjust as offensive, when by a word she can dispel all doubt? Shall she depart from her confidence in God and speak in self-defence, an act doubtless permissible, but human? Simplicity triumphs. Mary could have spoken without being at fault, yet she does not. All is the work of God. She will rely wholly on Him; and she is not deceived, her simplicity is rewarded. God vindicates Mary, and sends his Angel to make known the truth to Joseph.

The confidence of a simple soul is never unprofitable. The more fully she surrenders herself to God, the more God will take care of her interests.

Mary is simple when, led by grace, she goes to Elizabeth, that she may share her joy. She denies nothing of what has taken place; she states the facts as they are; but she refers all to God, claiming no merit for herself: 'He that is mighty has done great things to me.'

Mary is simple when, at a word from the Angel, she goes into Egypt with Joseph, heedless of the danger of the journey, as of the uncer-

* St. Matt. i. 19.

tainties of the future. She is simple at Nazareth, where, during thirty years, she leaves men ignorant of the honour which has befallen her. She is simple when Jesus leaves her to begin His public life, and no longer lives with her. She lets Him go, in spite of her deep sorrow, for she knows that God so wills it.

She remembers the prophecy of Simeon, she feels already the point of the sword which must pierce her heart. She foresees great trials. But in all things she sees God, and her simplicity gives her courage to accept all generously.

And oh, how simple Mary is during the passion of her Son!

Above and beyond her own suffering, beyond the waves of bitterness which fill her soul, beyond even the atrocious agony of her beloved Jesus, she sees the Divine Will, the Eternal justice shining forth in all its radiance, and the overflowing of the Infinite Mercy. She sees our souls redeemed, saved; above all, she sees God known, loved and praised, God for ever glorified.

She keeps the eyes of her heart fixed on God, and draws from Him strength to freely acquiesce in the suffering and death of her Son, desiring them because Jesus does so, and because God so wills it; and *priest*, as it were, of this great sacrifice for the world's redemption, Mary offers Jesus to His Father in this supreme immola-

tion, which for ever assures the triumph and the glory of God.

Simple, Mary remains, to the very end of her life. In the Resurrection, her crowning joy, she thinks far less of her own personal happiness than of the multitude of souls following Jesus up to Heaven, there to praise God eternally.

And when Jesus, ascending to Heaven, leaves her during long years desolate upon the earth, she does not complain; she does not ask why; she does not urge her rights. For her it is enough that God wills it so, to acquiesce with all her heart.

She suffers, she is tortured, but she is happy and content; because, being simple, she forgets herself, forgets her own anguish, and sees only the glory of her Son and the glory of God.

By such perfect simplicity she merits the greatest of rewards. When God's hour is come, Jesus calls her from above: 'Come,' He says, 'come, my dove, my love, my fair one, that I may crown thy perfection!'* And Mary soars eagerly toward her Divine Son. Even her body united to her soul is borne above by the angels. As her simplicity has surpassed that of all creatures, so her reward surpasses all. Higher than all the Angels, higher than all the seraphim, above

* St. Jerome applies to Mary the words of the Canticle: 'Come, My dove, My pure one!'

all the elect, she is closest of all to Jesus in glory.

Between Jesus and Mary, between God and Mary in this world, simplicity produced the most perfect union possible. Between Jesus and Mary, between God and Mary in Heaven, this union is for ever consummated. Mary for ever remains alone of all created beings 'the perfect dove' of God.*

Oh, Mary, be our mirror of simplicity, that reflected in you the radiant simplicity of Jesus may no longer dazzle and dismay us, but, softened, may enrapture us and win our hearts. Make us love simplicity more and more, and because of it may we love you, your Divine Son, and God His Father; that we may in the end find you with Them in Heaven in the Blessed Unity of eternal happiness.

* St. Germanus said to Mary: 'Hail, sweet dove, who bears for us the olive-branch, and Him who has saved us from universal death!'

AN ESSENTIALLY SIMPLE SOUL: ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

CHAPTER XVII

AN ESSENTIALLY SIMPLE SOUL: ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI

AFTER Jesus, after Mary, amongst the innumerable Saints honoured by the Church, is there no one who carried simplicity to a higher point of perfection—no one who shows us a more noble example of it than Francis, known as the 'poor man of Assisi.'

Poverty is his chosen virtue. He took her for his Lady, his Spouse. He exalted her above all others; and is not poverty the result—we may even say the offspring—of simplicity?

It is because the simple soul always looks steadfastly toward God that she forgets all else, and frees herself from all, crying out with St. Paul: 'I count all things as dung, that I may gain Christ.'

The virtue of poverty could not exist without simplicity. It is through simplicity that poverty becomes possible, and takes life as a child takes life from its mother.

Francis of Assisi was simplicity itself. His youth and vocation, his life and wonderful works, his last years and death, all speak of simplicity, because he had no other thought, no other desire, than to perfectly resemble Jesus Christ.

He is born in a stable like Our Blessed Lord. God so wills it the better to shadow forth the characteristic which will mark his whole life.

His youthful companions are unanimous in their praise of his frankness, his honesty, his gaiety, the sincerity of his soul—in a word, his simplicity. This simplicity averts envy and jealousy, drives away all mistrust, wins him sympathy all unsought, makes him beloved of all, and the chosen king of many a festival.

It is his simplicity which snatches him from the world, and leads him into the paths of the highest perfection.

He comes forth from a banquet; his companions stroll on, gaily singing. Suddenly he stops, and motionless, his face shining, he gazes on high in ecstasy. What does he see? The greatness of God, and the nothingness of man.

This momentary glance suffices. That which he has seen he will never forget. His decision is taken: he will give himself wholly to God.

But how can he effect his purpose? He opens the Gospel and reads: 'If thou wilt be

perfect, go, sell what thou hast . . . and come and follow Me.'*

He neither reasons nor argues; he does not qualify the word of God. Jesus tells him to despoil himself of all that he has, and to follow Him. He obeys to the letter, and setting at naught all human respect, the opposition of men, and that even of his own father, exposing himself to ridicule, insult, and destitution, he despoils himself absolutely, leaving even his cloak, and keeping as his only garment a tunic and cord, and as his only book a cross. Never was simplicity carried farther. A word of the Gospel had sufficed to reduce him to this extremity—in the eyes of the world madness.

And from that moment Francis never turned back.

In a truly marvellous abandonment to Divine Providence, never before seen in such a degree, he founds a religious Order upon this principle of universal and perpetual renunciation of all that is not indispensable to life, and for ever forbids to his disciples the possession of this world's goods. He even goes to the length of destroying with his own hands a convent which had been built contrary to his directions.

He is simple towards his superiors. He asks the Sovereign Pontiff to confirm the indulgence

* St. Matt. xix. 21.

of the Portiuncula which has been granted him by revelation, and when the Holy Father assents he goes away. The Pope is forced to call him, that he may take a written testimonial of the signal favour thus obtained.

He is simple with his brothers, he feels himself the least among them. He wishes his disciples to be called 'Minors,' which is to say, 'less than others.'

He is simple with all creatures. Like the first Adam, in the state of innocence, he talks to the birds, the beasts and fishes; he exhorts all nature to praise God. For himself he sees God in all His works.

The soul of Francis is truly the soul of a child; clear and transparent, ignoring evil, with a horror of all duplicity; the soul of the dove wherein is reflected in all its beauty the simplicity of the Gospel.

Follow him in all his journeyings, in all his innumerable projects and plans, in the midst of his brethren. He cares for nothing human, nothing created, he despises all.

He sees, seeks, and desires only God. *Deus meus, et omnia:* 'My God and my all.' Such is his motto, his essential spirit. All things are as nothing to Him; God alone is his all, his unique treasure.

Jesus, poor and despoiled of all, Jesus on

the Cross, overwhelmed by poverty and neglect, is ever present to Francis, the object of his tenderest devotion. We find him at the foot of the Cross, in the embrace of his Lord, on the heart of his Saviour. He aspires only to be poor and crucified like Him, to sacrifice himself in the same way for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, to receive in his hands and feet and in his heart the same wounds as did the Redeemer of the world.

And more than ever after this extraordinary miracle, visible in his flesh to the eyes of all, Francis becomes an object of enthusiasm to the people. From all sides they flock to him, they hasten, they long to see him, to touch him, to kiss his bleeding stigmata.

And so great is his simplicity, his total self-forgetfulness, and his regard for God alone, that he seeks neither to fly, nor in any way to escape this homage. A less simple soul would have been distrustful of self, and would have feared self-love and vain complacency

But Francis is so wholly dead to self, that the natural man no longer exists in him; he has made way for God.

Francis no longer sees himself; he sees only God wishing to be glorified in His creature.

He said: 'I no longer have eyes for the creature, my whole soul cries out to the Creator;

neither Heaven nor earth contain aught that is sweet to me; all becomes dim before the love of Christ.'*

Thus, having touched the highest point of simplicity, it only remains for him to leave this earth for Heaven.

His last moments draw near; God calls him to his crown of glory. He lies upon his back the better to see Heaven, and finding his poor bed too good, he begs to be laid upon the bare earth, that so he may taste poverty in its full sweetness. And after this last act of simplicity, happy to be more like Jesus on the Cross, his body half-raised, his face shining with love, he gives back his soul to God, he goes to unite himself eternally to Him Whom He has uniquely sought and loved here below!

Such simplicity is beyond all ordinary strength. God only can raise a chosen soul to such heights by extraordinary graces. May such an example be for you, however, a beacon light to guide you amidst the storms and dangers of this world. May you better understand by this radiant light the words of the 'Imitation': 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity save to love God, and to serve Him alone!'

May you better understand the necessity and importance of that simplicity which beyond all

* Canticle III.

temporal goods and creatures sees and seeks only the Creator.

May we all become simple according to our state and condition, and according to the degree of Grace which God gives to each. May each strive to reach the degree of simplicity to which God calls them.

The measure of your simplicity will be determined by your submission to God upon earth, as will also be your enjoyment of God in Heaven.

The more you resemble the dove, the higher your flight in the grace of this world and in the glory of the next.

THE HOLY GHOST AND SIMPLICITY

CHAPTER XVIII

THE HOLY GHOST AND SIMPLICITY

THE preceding chapters have shown us that simplicity is essentially a gift of the Holy Ghost—or, rather, the pre-eminent gift—since it is the Spirit of God substituted for the spirit of man. Simplicity is the Spirit of God in Christ, and by Him in you yourselves, that you may say with the Apostle: 'Now I live, yet not I; but Christ liveth in me.'*

The Gospel tells us this clearly, and shows us the dove as the symbol at once of the Holy Ghost and of simplicity. It is under this form that the Holy Ghost descends upon Jesus on the banks of the Jordan.

The devotion to the Holy Ghost, too often neglected by the faithful and misunderstood by many, is thus the most excellent means of attaining to simplicity.

The Holy Ghost is in each one of us. He descended upon us at our Baptism as upon Jesus

* St. Paul.

at the Jordan. This presence within us is not transitory. The Holy Ghost comes to remain and to dwell within us, as is testified by the special character conferred upon us in the sacraments of Baptism and of Confirmation.

And still further, the Holy Ghost dwelling within us would act in us, and His whole action, influence, and inspiration tend to fashion us in His likeness, to make us simple as He is simple. Scripture tells us 'that whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.'* The Son is the image and the likeness of the Father. By acting in the Spirit of God we become like Our God, as the Son is like the Father; we become one with Them, and like unto Them.

But the Holy Ghost cannot act in us without our co-operation. We must correspond to His grace, and follow His inspirations and movements. When we sin, we go against Him; we sadden Him. We can even kill His life within us. We can also paralyze Him, prevent Him from acting, destroy His power.

In order to attain to simplicity and grow therein each day, we must let ourselves be led by the Holy Spirit; we must co-operate with Him, and work with Him to the same end—give ourselves up to Him, in fact, without reserve and for ever.

* Rom. viii. 14.

Then His power will increase each day in our soul, and we ourselves will decrease accordingly. We shall 'put Him on' more and more as we put off the spirit of the world—His mortal enemy.

The whole progress of simplicity will finally depend upon the victorious occupation of our heart by the Holy Ghost. It is His work of predilection—we may say His only work—inasmuch as it is the most important and essential, and that all the rest depend upon it.

Simplicity is, in truth, the life of the Holy Ghost within us. And when a soul acts solely in the Spirit of God, she is perfectly simple, and a daughter of God; she is wholly one and simple like her Father.

May the Holy Ghost, then, become our Master in all things: the Master of our thoughts, our feelings, our judgments and affections, our will, our acts—in a word, of our whole life—the Master supremely loved, eagerly obeyed, and always faithfully followed.

O God our Father, send Thy Spirit to us! O Jesus, send Him down upon our souls in fulfilment of Thy promise to us! May He work in us! May He renew all in us! May He create in us a new heart and a new soul; a new being, not born of flesh and blood, but of the will of God; a new creature, wherein evil

will have given place to all that is right and good, wherein all will be simple, because all will be from God and for God.

O Holy Ghost, glorify the Father and the Son, and glorify Thyself in transforming Thy creatures into Thine own likeness, and in giving them simplicity in all its fulness!

THE END

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